

DEAD END FOR CHA-CHA? ■ BIG BANKS IN MICROFINANCE

NEWSBREAK

We Make Sense of the News

MAY 8, 2006 **Php75**

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for granted.
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to unlocking the
poverty trap.

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■ DEAR READER ■

Decoding De Venecia

THERE'S A text joke making the rounds that Cha-cha via people's initiative is part of the De Venecia Code (an allusion to the *Da Vinci Code* and, of course, to Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr). It is partly accurate because it is something we need to decipher—and perhaps unlock the secrets to this mystifying turn of events.

We try to do that in this issue.

We began by spending an hour with the gracious House Speaker in his Makati condo. Talking to JDV, as he is widely known, is like partaking in a feast—of words. The Speaker, always enthusiastic, tends to exaggerate, and doesn't run out of bombast. Interviewing him can be alternately entertaining and frustrating because we're not certain if all of the Speaker's answers are for real. (*See Hot Seat, page 11*)

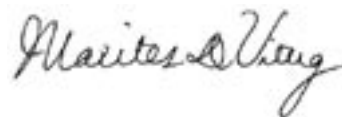
Still, we came away from the interview almost convinced that we would wake up, one morning in July, to see a Parliament that, in JDV's words, will be the "first free Parliament" we will ever have because the one under Marcos was a sham. In De Venecia's mind, the people's initiative is legitimate and everything will fall into place—unless the Supreme Court stops them on their tracks by issuing a TRO.

In our story, "Halt! It's a Dead End!" (page 12), we zoom in on a bigger picture and see the obstacles facing the current campaign styled as a people's initiative. The opposition is expected to question this before the Supreme Court.

Apart from the legal infirmities surrounding the campaign, a key issue is this: the House version of the proposed new Constitution, which will be adopted by a De Venecia Parliament, weakens the Supreme Court. How can the Supreme Court justices say yes to a plan that will strip them of their independence?

Meanwhile, we hope you will find our new look warm and comfortable. For the past two issues, we've made our layout more airy, we're using more photographs, and we've defined our sections better.

Enjoy the read.



You can reach Marites Dañguilan Vitug at: marites@newsbreak.com.ph

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ABOUT THE COVER: Model Michelle Robles poses for NEWSBREAK at the roof deck of Gabriel III Bldg. in Ortigas Center, Pasig. Stylist is Sand Chua Tak. Photograph by Luis Liwanag.



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Water, according to the Millennium Development Goals (MDG), is a main poverty indicator. The MDG calls for governments to cut in half, by 2015, the number of people without access to drinking water.

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In many barangay assemblies, those who attended were asked to sign blank sheets without explaining that these were for a people's initiative to amend the Charter.



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HOW DO YOU SOLVE POLL CHEATING?

OUR OFFICIALS, including those in the Commission on Elections, keep on mistaking election modernization for automated counting machines. To my mind, when you modernize the elections, you modernize the entire electoral system from registration of voters to the proclamation of winning candidates.

The electronic or automated counting of votes should be the least of our worries because cheating seldom happens there. In fact, the manual count with the public *taras* is the most transparent and honest segment of the election process. Why put it in a machine?

Some officials think otherwise. That's why we have an election automation that will never solve the election cheating problem.

MEHOL K. SADAIN

*Former commissioner, COMELEC
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RUBBERSTAMP PARLIAMENT

NOTHING IS more chilling than absolute authority in the hands of those who think they're the best because they're appointed by God ("Dear Reader," *NEWSBREAK*, April 24, 2006).

The track record of the Arroyo administration in circumventing the law will speak for itself. This single-minded pursuit of manipulating the Constitution calls to mind the warning of Lord Acton: "Power corrupts,

and absolute power corrupts absolutely."

We don't have a tradition of honor like Japan. Nobody here will resign, much less commit *hara-kiri*. The crisis in Thailand ended with the intervention of the king. Our nearest counterpart is the Archbishop of Manila. It's time for the Church to stop prostituting the memory of Cardinal Sin by its silence at this crucial hour.

The problem is the people, not the system. The Americans became the world's only superpower in a presidential-bicameral two-party system with the same Constitution for over two centuries. They started with absolutely nothing in a foreign wilderness surrounded by hostile natives.

On the other hand, we Filipinos have been deteriorating since Independence. And we started with the already functioning democratic and educational systems and infrastructure of the Commonwealth. That's because our character is essentially weak. We never take responsibility for our actions and instead hunt for scapegoats—the system. We are easily blinded by power and lose perspective.

Only in the Philippines can you find the election maxim "There are no losers, only those who are cheated." This is not funny. It's a slap to our honor as a nation.

Unless we face our shortcomings, we will never rise above ourselves. Unless we learn the lessons of history, then the martyrdom of our heroes would have been in vain.

JONATHAN AQUINO

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HE WANTS A JOB IN GOVERNMENT

I REALLY loved your cover story about the young technocrats in our government

("Gems in Government," *NEWSBREAK*, April 10, 2006). I want to work for a public office myself but after some searching, I am finding it difficult to look for a position in government offices.

MARK VISDA

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SLOGAN CONTEST

Panibagong Paraan 2006, a multi-partner program that encourages and supports innovative ideas to promote "Development with Equity" in the Philippines, has announced another new and exciting contest in partnership with Globe and *NEWSBREAK*. Called "Slogans on Development with Equity!", the contest will run from April 1 to May 8, 2006.

The first prize winner will win P25,000 in cash; second prize is P10,000, and third prize is P5,000. Finalists will get a P500 free load from Globe.

For more information about the Slogans on Development with Equity! contest, please visit the Panibagong Paraan 2006 website at <http://www.panibagongparaan.com>.

Shutterbugs also still have until April 30 to submit entries for the photo Competition. Entries for the photography competition must depict images showing how equity issues related to income and income opportunities, social services, assets, livelihood and natural resources, and voice or participation, can be addressed in the Philippines. Check the website for details.



HAWK EYES

A READER called to point out our error. In "The Real Best Leaders", on page 20 of our April 24, 2006, issue, we wrote that Quezon City, under Mayor Feliciano Belmonte, is running a P5-million annual budget. It's P5 billion. Our apologies.

Magandang araw mula sa San Miguel

Sa pagsisikap, natutupad ang maraming pangarap. Alam ng San Miguel ito. Kaya naman sinisikap nito na gawing mas masarap, mas maginhawa ang bawat araw. Ikinataguyod ang mga programang nakatutulong sa pagpapaligid na buhay at kabuhayan. Tulad ng "Operation Limis Taal" sa Batangas na nangangalaga sa kalusugan ng mga isda doon. At ang "Tulong-tulong sa Tullahan" na muling binubuhay ang Tullahan River para sa kapakanan ng mga taga-Malabon at Valenzuela. At siyempre, mahusay na gumagawa ang San Miguel Corporation ng mga de-kalidad at abot-kayang mga produkto para sa bawat Pilipino.



SAN MIGUEL CORPORATION

PAGADIAN'S BIG BROTHER

CITY GOVERNMENT officials here have ventured into an ambitious and expensive project to thwart criminals. Mayor Samuel Co told NEWSBREAK that more than P3 million was spent for the purchase of about 75 units of surveillance cameras.

These units were installed in this city's major thoroughfares and the four newly established police substations, "just to determine and monitor the ins and outs of persons and allow us to have access to all points," Co said.

He said that he was inspired by the *Pinoy Big Brother* show of ABS-CBN.

In April, a new gadget will be installed to protect the cameras from lightning since "not all are working especially if we encounter strong thunder and lightning."

His major reason for the project? "We need to fight crime and if it will require going high-tech, why not?"

Zamboanga del Sur provincial police director Senior Supt. Ramon Ochotorena agreed with Co, claiming that crimes had gone down the past year.

However, 2nd District Gov. Aurora Cerilles is not buying the idea of spending millions for a project

MAYOR SAMUEL CO
(inset) and the city's
surveillance system



whose effectiveness has yet to be proven. "We secure the prime city, but what about the nearby municipalities? Not all crimes occur within the city proper," Cerilles said in an interview.

The opening of a municipal road linking Pagadian City to Cotabato City through Tukuran provided a major entry and exit point to syndicated criminals, according to former Zamboanga del Sur provincial police director Senior Supt. Karib Muammil.

"Pagadian City is used as a hub. These criminals are not really from Zamboanga del Sur; they come from nearby provinces and cities," Muammil said. "Aware of all the monitoring cameras, they will make sure not to commit crimes on the city's major streets." — **By Julie S. Alipala** in Pagadian City

WAITING FOR THE SUPREME COURT

THREE KEY cases that bear on President Arroyo's powers are up for decision by the Supreme Court.

The most important is the petition questioning Executive Order 464. If the High Court rules that it is unconstitutional, Cabinet members and others in the executive department can now appear before Congress to testify in anti-Arroyo investigations. The petition was filed in October last year and was submitted for decision in March. NEWSBREAK learned that the Supreme Court is expected to make a decision before the end of April or in May.

The delay is causing concern among some sectors. Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban is due to retire in December—yet there seems to be no sense of urgency in acting on these cases.

Supreme Court Information Officer Gleo Guerra does not think so: "The court will not [drag its foot on] this case. The justices are aware of the transcendental importance of this case. But still it has to go through the process. There is no such thing as [an] instant decision."

She said it is unfair to accuse the Court of delaying the disposition of cases when it has in fact relaxed its own rules to make sure that the requirements of due process are adequately complied with.

The petition questioning the "no permit, no

Verbatim

WHY THAKSIN RETREATED

THANET APHORNSUVAN is director of the Southeast Asia Studies Program of Thammasat University. He was a member of the Constitution Movement in October 1973, which campaigned for the establishment of a constitutional government and led the mass demonstration against the military-led government. Riots broke out, resulting in the downfall of the military regime and the beginning of democracy. NEWSBREAK contributing writer Patricio Abinales interviewed Thanet by e-mail. Excerpts:

Could you give us an idea of the groups that coalesced

against Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra?

The coalition consists of disenchanted intellectuals and the middle class, together with strong support from labor and NGO activists. The formation of the People's Alliance of Democracy (PAD) is unique, unlike previous protests against the government.

The loosely organized PAD received support from business people, civic leaders, academics, provincial teachers, state enterprise workers, NGOs, and a group of senators. The PAD became the unofficial leading organ of this vast united front against Thaksin.



THANET APHORNSUVAN

There are about 100 organizations in this big coalition.

You've been a witness to confrontations between democratic movements and autocrats in Thailand since the 1970s. Is

there anything different in the current protests?

The most important one is the neutral role of the military, especially the army. In the October Uprisings of 1973 and '76, and the bloody May 1992, the military was used to violently crush the demonstra-

tions in the name of peace and order and the monarchy. This time the army declared their neutrality in the conflict between the government and the opponents, saying that they are the people's and the king's army.



CHIEF JUSTICE ARTEMIO PANGANIBAN

NEWSBREAK FILE

filed also in October last year.

Constitution expert and retired Supreme Court Associate Justice Vicente Mendoza said that under the Constitution, the High Court has 24 months to resolve a case, from the time the last memoranda are submitted.

Article VIII Section 15 (1) of the Constitution provides that “all cases or matters filed after the effectivity of this Constitution must be decided or resolved within 24 months from date of submission [to] the Supreme Court.”

“You cannot rush the judgment of these cases. You must consider that the question being raised to the Supreme Court is not that easy,” said Mendoza.

But he explained that it does not always take the Supreme Court that long to decide on cases. “There is also the question of urgency. If the petition is urgent, they do not have to wait 24 months.”

For example, the High Court immediately scheduled an oral argument a day after the first petitions questioning Presidential Proclamation 1017 were filed by professor and columnist Randy David, the Alternative Law Groups, and the *Daily Tribune*.

Proclamation 1017 was submitted for decision after March 22 or 15 days after the oral argument.

Mendoza said it is up to the High Court, meeting en banc, to determine whether a case is urgent or not. (See www.newsbreak.com.ph for details on the cases.)

—**By Tetch Torres/Inq7.net**

rally” provision of Batas Pambansa 880 or the Public Assembly Act and Calibrated Preemptive Response (CPR) has not yet been submitted for decision even though the first petition was

Pundits highlight the great divide between the so-called pro-Thaksin rural populace and the anti-Thaksin Bangkok urbanites. Is this an accurate portrait?

It is correct to a certain point. One is the urban-based middle classes; the other, the Caravan of the Poor, is mainly the farmers. But this protest movement runs deep and wide into the fabric of society.

I look at the great divide as between those who reject Thaksin’s patronage system and those who favor his patronage. Since the heart of Thaksin’s populist policies and handouts are mostly in the rural areas, less commercialized provinces, and low-income areas of Bangkok, these groups are likely to come out to support

their vested interests.

Why was Thaksin vulnerable?

He and the TRT Party saw unprecedented protest that was widespread throughout the country, especially in the Bangkok area where huge crowds could be seen and heard shouting, “Thaaaaaak-Sin, Get Out!!!” Thaksin and his colleagues never thought that there were so many people who disliked or even hated them so deeply. This is very unusual in the Thai setting, where those with power always trust that the common people will kowtow to them and be docile, no matter how much they don’t like them. The protests became a nationwide movement. That’s why it lasted 34 days and nights.

This unsocial behavior stressed out Thaksin more than other things. His charisma was shattered. In Thai history, that means the end of the ruler is coming.

What’s next?

Even though Thaksin will not become the next Prime Minister, he and his TRT Party still remain in power. All things considered, Thaksin’s retreat is not a defeat.

The opposition parties, the PAD, and civic groups expressed concern that Thaksin still holds significant power over the party and even in the new government. A post-Thaksin era thus is not totally smooth and clear. Meantime, peace and order is being restored and the threat of violence has been averted. ■

And they said...

“You will be cursed by the other generations, and you will come to rule over them.”

JESUS *confided to Judas, as shown in an early Christian manuscript made public recently*

“We are not fighting the terrorists in Sulu—but but their ideas.”

GEN. BRYAN BROWN, *commander of the US Special Operations Command, a global anti-terror force*



“People have confidence in us. That’s the most important thing.”

JAIME ZOBEL DE AYALA, *after his retirement as chairman of Ayala Corp.*

“It’s nice to be first. It’s better to be right.”

JEFF JACOBY, *Boston Globe columnist, on the rush to judge journalist Jill Carroll after she was released by her captors in Baghdad*



REBELS?: (from left) Luz Ilagan, Omar Bantayan, and Jeppie Ramada

CAROLYN ARGUILLAS

THE DAVAO 8

A FEBRUARY 24 rally of militant groups which Davao City Mayor Rodrigo Duterte also attended, albeit briefly, is now the subject of an affidavit-complaint for rebellion filed against Bayan Muna Rep. Joel Virador and eight others.

Mayor Duterte was not named in the complaint.

Aside from Virador, named in the March 7 complaint filed by policemen Franco S. Duca and Rex Rodriguez, were Luz Ilagan, 59, local chair of Gabriela Women's party-list; Ariel Casilao, 26, Bagong

Alyansang Makabayan; Jeppie Ramada, 24, Bayan Muna party-list; Omar Bantayan, 28, Kilusang Mayo Uno-Southern Mindanao Region; Antonio Flores, 56, Anakpawis party list; Corazon Espinoza, 49, Samakana-Davao; Inday Duterte, 54, Kadamay-Davao; and Lorie Ann Cascaro, 22, Anakbayan-Davao City chapter.

The February 24 march-rally was held to commemorate the 20th anniversary of People Power 1. On the same day, President Arroyo issued Proclamation 1017, placing the country under a state of national emergency.

Virador was arrested on Feb-

ruary 27 in Davao City, just as he was lining up to re-book his ticket at the Philippine Airlines office. Six operatives of the Criminal Investigation and Detection Group (CIDG) reportedly handcuffed him. No warrant of arrest was presented.

He was brought to the CIDG office here. Mayor Duterte, a prosecutor during the Marcos era, escorted him to Manila that evening, as requested by Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. and House Majority Floor-leader Prospero Nograles.

Duca and Rodriguez said that on February 24, Virador and the eight other leaders "started to march...together with some of the militant groups based here in Davao City wherein, they shouted their politically inclined beliefs to establish a transitional council to replaced (sic) the Arroyo regime and to oust PGMA and all other related issues to opposed (sic) the government interest."

The two also cited an "ambush interview" by a TV reporter where Virador "strongly call [sic] for the immediate resignation of PGMA."

The complaint was made "to support the charges of rebellion against the above-mentioned militant leaders under the provisions of Art.

134 in relation to Art 135 of the Revised Penal Code."

Article 134 states that rebellion is committed "by rising publicly and taking arms against the Government for the purpose of removing allegiance from said Government or its laws, the territory of the Philippine Islands or any part thereof, of any body of land, naval or other armed forces, depriving the Chief Executive or the Legislature, wholly or partially, of any of their powers or prerogatives."

Ilagan, whose late husband, Larry, was the first of "Davao 3" lawyers who were detained for alleged subversion in May 1985, said she found the complaint "at the least, funny and at the most, ridiculous."

She noted many lapses, including the fact that she did not march and "never made seditious or rebellious calls." Ilagan served as city councilor from 1998 to 2001 and acting councilor shortly after People Power 1.

Ilagan said Mayor Duterte even dropped by to say he was allowing rallies (other mayors weren't) "because that is democratic" and guaranteed by the Constitution.—**Carolyn O. Arguillas/MindaNews**

BIOLOGY: A BRIGHT SPOT IN LOCAL S & T

THE PHILIPPINES is 16th in a list of 44 countries from around the world in terms of "relative prominence of scientific literature" on biology, according to the latest *Science and Engineering Indicators* (2006) published by the US-based National Science Foundation.

"Relative prominence of scientific literature" essentially indicates how often scientists from other countries cite published research written by scientists in the Philippines as against how often our own scientists cite research published abroad. (An index of 1.00 indi-

cates that the country's share of cited literature equals its world share of scientific literature.)

Based on these criteria, Switzerland topped the list in biology, earning 1.025 for sci-

entific literature published in 1995 and 1.264 for literature published in 2003.

For its part, Philippine literature on biology for the year 2003 earned 0.745 points—an

improvement from 1995 figures where the country's scholars only earned 0.470 points in this category. The Philippines bested its more technologically advanced neighbors, including Japan (which ranked 39th, having earned 0.456 points), Malaysia (35th, with 0.493 points), Singapore (32nd, with 0.518 points), and South Korea (26th, with 0.570 points).

The National Science Foundation is an independent Federal Agency created by the US Congress in 1950 to promote the progress of science.

—**Gemma B. Bagayaua**



PAUL MATA

The Supreme Court will have to move to save the nation

SPEAKER Jose De Venecia Jr., prime mover and cheerleader for Charter change, spoke to NEWSBREAK editors Marites Dañguilan Vitug, Glenda M. Gloria, Miriam Grace A. Go, and contributing writer Isagani de Castro Jr. Excerpts:

You said that we'd have a parliament by July.

We had wanted it much earlier, but the conventional route that we prefer is the constituent assembly, which means we need three-fourths vote of all the members of Congress. I've been appealing to the senators. They want a constitutional convention. That's another way of saying, "Goodbye, charter change."

But the process must educate the public....

We've been discussing this Charter change for 15 years. If you go down to brass tacks, the issues are: do you want a parliamentary or presidential form of government? Do you want two Congresses or one Congress? Do you want a bicameral or unicameral Congress? Do you want to lift economic restrictions?

We can have the luxury of time if there are no threats from the communist group and the rightists who want to bring down the government. They almost succeeded last February....

Are you saying that if we shift to a parliamentary form of government, there will be no more coups?

It would be very much less. The reason there are so many coup attempts is [that] poverty continues, and the failure of the presidential form of government and bicameral Congress to address grave problems. Why? Because of the constant gridlock between the Senate and the House, the fighting between the senators and Malacañang.

What can we expect in the next few months?

The most difficult part of people's initiative is the gathering of signatures. The Constitution prescribes an average of 12

percent registered voters in all of the 13 congressional districts, not less than 3 percent in any congressional district. You miss one district and the whole process is nullified. Thank God, the signature gathering was completed in two weeks. We got 8.3 million signatures.

What's next after the signatures are in?

The Comelec registrars are undertaking verification procedures. Meantime, barangay officials are certifying that these signa-



PAUL MATA

tures are those of voters in their barangays. The Comelec will tally all of these—and probably say after a meeting en banc that it is sufficient as to form and substance.

But there is no enabling law.

Let me finish the road map first. The Comelec will then schedule a plebiscite.... Upon ratification, the parliamentary government begins. That's why I keep saying it will be in July.

What will be the first thing on the agenda of the parliament?

Whoever is the prime minister must submit a program of government.

You will be prime minister....

It's not my driving ambition.

There will be no election in 2007?

I am for elections in 2007. It does not look nice that we will be passing legislation that will benefit us.

The new interim parliament, within 45 days from ratification [of the amendment in a] plebiscite, shall convene to propose more revisions to the Constitution. The people's initiative will just tackle the shift to a parliamentary form....

What if this people's initiative fails?

That's why we have two tracks. The constituent assembly is the other track.

How is the second track going?

We have about 180 signatures, we're short of 15. The 15 are getting more difficult to get. Some people are suggesting that we entice them—then we would have lost the moral ground in calling for a new Constitution. We cannot start by buying votes.

The enabling law is an obstacle to your people's initiative....

There is a law. There may be some defects—but all laws have defects. The Supreme Court ruling of 1997 authorized the COMELEC to assist in the preparation of the petition, help in putting signature stations, and in gathering signatures and verifying these. We welcome a challenge before the Supreme Court so that they can ask for a TRO to stop the COMELEC.

It's said that Cha-cha is being used as part of the President's survival plan.

The President campaigned on this platform—unicameral parliamentary system—long before she ran into this trouble of impeachment.

What's your reading of the Supreme Court?

I think the Supreme Court realizes that they will really have to move to save the nation. The next coup attempt may just be successful. Even they will be abolished.

Let's say for the sake of argument that there will be a second impeachment against Gloria, then it goes to the Senate. The trial can go on for one to two years—radio and TV will be focused on the trial every day. The Philippines will not be able to do anything else. They [military] will launch a coup—and it will be successful.

Will the opposition get the numbers for an impeachment complaint? You have the majority in the House.

It's possible. They may just do it because they're fed up. ■

HALT! IT'S A DEAD END!

The onrushing train called people's initiative might not reach the station

By MIRIAM GRACE A. GO

DOES THE following passage sound harmless to you? "All courts existing at the time of the ratification of this Constitution shall continue to exercise their jurisdiction, until otherwise provided by law. The provisions of the existing Rules of Court, judiciary acts, and procedural laws not inconsistent with this Constitution shall remain operative unless amended or repealed by the Supreme Court or the National Assembly."

This transitory provision (Article XIX, Section 3) in the draft Constitution that the House of Representatives is circulating could spell the defeat of the government-backed people's initiative (PI) campaign.

Speaker Jose de Venecia Jr. admits that the PI campaign by an organization called Sigaw ng Bayan is his idea, broached in September last year. It came amid the Senate's persistent refusal to sit down with the House of Representatives and turn the two chambers into a Constituent Assembly that would propose wide-ranging changes in the Constitution.

This particular initiative calls for a shift to a parliamentary form of government and effectively abolishes the Senate. Once this happens, the new parliament—a single chamber composed of the present set of

congressmen, senators, and Cabinet officials—can freely rewrite the Constitution. De Venecia says the new parliament will likely adapt the current draft Constitution of the House.

Despite the absence of an enabling law, administration allies have gathered signatures for a PI. In 1997, the Supreme Court decided that Republic Act 6735, the law meant to set the parameters for people's initiatives and referenda, is inadequate.

The signature gatherers—congressmen, governors, mayors, and Sigaw ng Bayan—are confident that the Supreme Court would reverse its decision. This confidence isn't without basis: all the justices who had ruled that RA 6735 wasn't the enabling law have retired; two of those who said the law was sufficient are still with the Court, one of whom is Chief Justice Artemio Panganiban; the rest are appointees of the President.

However, if the justices will read Section 3 of the draft Charter more carefully, they might think twice about upholding the current initiative. If it were approved, an interim unicameral parliament would be set up, and the new legislature could pass a law that would—according to some legal experts—virtually make the Supreme Court a mere appendage of the parliament.

In effect, parliament can do two things with regard to the Supreme Court that Congress can't do under the present setup: take away from the High Tribunal jurisdiction over certain cases, and revise the Rules of Court promulgated by the Supreme Court. In effect, this will rob the High Court of its



independence.

There's a sweetener, however: Section 4 extends the retirement age of the justices from 65 to 70 (Section 4).

As we went to press, the issue had yet to reach the Supreme Court. The proponents had not yet filed their petition with the Commission on Elections (COMELEC). Without such a petition, the opposition couldn't formally ask for its rejection.

The administration has apparently learned from the mistake committed by the group that launched a people's initiative campaign in 1997, the People's Initiative for Reform,

T I M E

THE CHA-CHA TRAIN

2005

March 1 – The House committee on constitutional amendments, chaired by Cagayan de Oro's Constantino Jaraula, issues Committee Report 413, the consolidation of all resolutions calling for Charter change.

Dec. 13 – Seven members of the Constitutional Commission (CONCOM) submit to the President a minority report, enumerating the reasons they don't support the majority's proposals.

Some of the dissenting seven will later reveal last-minute insertions to the CONCOM's draft Constitution, which can be found in the Jaraula report as well. These include the cancellation of the 2007 elections that will extend the terms of office of the current elected officials from national down to the local level.

Dec. 16 – The CONCOM submits to the President its proposed amendments to the 1987 Constitution.

Dec. 24 – The Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines (ULAP) announces that it lobbied for no-elections proposal to be included in the CONCOM draft, for them to support the move.

2006

Jan. 7 – Eastern Samar Gov. Ben Evardone announces that ULAP will launch the people's initiative campaign in February, have a plebiscite in May or June, and have the interim parliament in July (similar to Speaker Jose de Venecia's timetable). Groups with links to the President and the Speaker have started consulta-

tions around the country.

Some officials of local government leagues say that the draft petition for people's initiative that they will circulate to their constituents is being prepared by Rey Roquero, a former secretary general of the League of Municipalities, who works for presidential



REP. RONALDO PUNO

RICO GONZALES

Modernization, and Action (PIRMA).

PIRMA had wanted to lift the term limits on elected officials, including the President. Some convenors of PIRMA filed a petition with the COMELEC to help the group set up signature stations nationwide, a lawful request at the time because RA 6735 mandates the poll body to assist any people's initiative campaign that way. That request—which was not yet the petition to introduce an amendment to the Constitution—gave reason for objectors to ask the Supreme Court to issue a temporary restraining order to the COMELEC so it wouldn't entertain any petition for a people's initiative to amend the Constitution. When PIRMA finally filed its petition, along with the requisite signatures, COMELEC's hands were tied by the TRO.

This time, Sigaw ng Bayan is trying to skirt the process for a people's initiative, as prescribed by RA 6735.

The law provides that a petition should be backed by the signatures of at least 12 percent of the total registered voters nationwide. In that 12 percent, at least 3 percent from every legislative district should be represented.

Once the petition is submitted to the COMELEC, the latter should verify each signature within 30 days. If it finds the petition sufficient in form and substance, the COMELEC should schedule a plebiscite within 45 to 90 days. On the same day that the counting of votes is completed and the yes votes win, the result of the plebiscite should be transmitted to Congress. The amendment then takes effect immediately.

In some areas, local officials and Sigaw ng Bayan ask people to sign sheets of paper that don't carry the required summary of the petition. Proponents also ask any barangay official to issue a certification that says,

yes, these are signatures of registered voters in his or her area. The barangay certifications are submitted to the local election officers to become the basis for issuing certifications that the signatures from a particular locality are valid.

What will then be transmitted to the central office of the COMELEC are certifications from the local poll offices. The certifications will be attached to the petition that Sigaw ng Bayan will submit to the COMELEC.

Apparently, the proponents think that with these certifications acquired in advance, their petition will be approved as soon as it's submitted to the COMELEC. That will effectively do away with the verification

The Supreme Court will be asked to approve an initiative that will lead to a new Constitution that, ironically, might end up clipping the justices' power.

period, in which the opposition can contest the authenticity of each signature. But that would leave the anti-Charter change groups no time to take the issue to the Supreme Court. In fact, even if they're able to question the process before the tribunal, and the COMELEC goes with the De Venecia plan, a plebiscite could be set before the Supreme Court can issue a TRO.

Note, however, that some election field officers have raised questions on their being assigned to verify such signatures and have resisted pressures to hasten the process.

What the anti-Charter change groups

can do is draft several versions of a counter petition and file whichever would fit the still-unknown form of a petition that Sigaw ng Bayan will come up with.

The opposition groups aren't bound either by the verification shortcut that the proponents of people's initiative have taken; they can demand an honest-to-goodness verification of signatures—this time after Sigaw ng Bayan has submitted the petition.

But why the rush for Charter change?

Some say the train is aiming for two key destinations: one is to distract the opposition from preparing an impeachment complaint against President Arroyo; the other is to suspend the scheduled senatorial and local elections next year.

If the train is stopped midway, President Arroyo will remain President, and the opposition, most likely sapped by the administration's tricks by July, may not be able to impeach her.

However, this would also mean that the elections would be held in May 2007. Some political observers say that given the administration's unpopularity, the opposition might just sweep the elections (a recent Pulse Asia survey showed that 65 percent want President Arroyo out)—and a new Congress might just be able to impeach President Arroyo.

This won't sit well with Ms. Arroyo. Which is why she has found her staunchest allies among many local officials, who would only be too glad to have their terms extended under a new parliament that would pass a law canceling next year's polls.

As the political drama unfolds, one of two things is certain: either the Arroyo-De Venecia train crashes soon or makes it to its final stop, but only after the 2007 polls. ■

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political affairs adviser Gabriel Claudio and is closely identified with De Venecia.

Congressmen who belong to KAMPI, the President's original party now headed by Antipolo Rep. Ronaldo Puno, joined the campaign.

Feb. 16 – Puno is named DILG secretary. Undersecretary Ed Soliman, who specializes in barangay-level organizing, is plucked out of the DILG and named head of the Office of External Affairs under the Office of the President.

Feb. 23 – DILG Undersecretary Wencelito Andanar issues a mem-

orandum ordering DILG officials, governors, mayors, and barangay chairpersons to conduct barangay assemblies on March 25 and on October 21 to discuss "issues affecting the country."

March 10 – DILG's Andanar issues another memorandum ordering DILG and local officials to conduct barangay assemblies.

March 24 – COMELEC's director in Region 8, Adolfo Ibañez, writes the COMELEC's law division asking for a legal opinion on whether they can verify signatures for the people's initiative.



JES AZNAR

March 25 – Barangay assemblies are held in several provinces. In most areas, those who attended were asked to sign blank sheets without explaining to them what the signatures were for.

—Sigaw ng Bayan, which claims to be the umbrella organization of some

100 groups working for Charter change, holds a press conference to introduce itself as the group behind the signature gathering campaign. It's led by CONCOM member Raul Lambino, a lawyer from Pangasinan, De Venecia's home province.

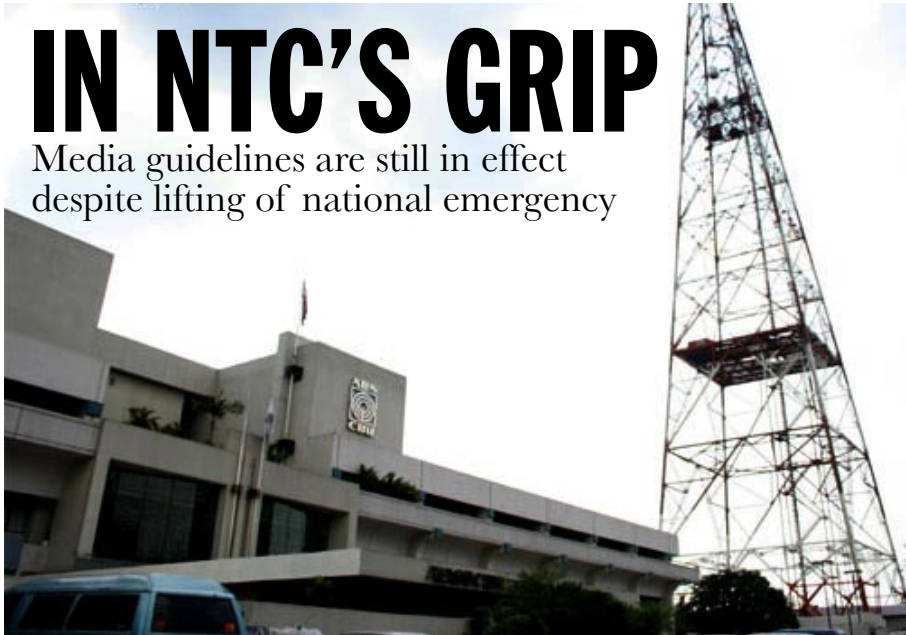
It announces that it gathered some 2 million signatures from the barangay assemblies a day before.

March 26 – Sigaw claims to have gathered an additional 2 million signatures in just one day.

COMELEC law division chief Alioden Dalaig issues a memorandum saying that COMELEC registrars can verify signatures.

IN NTC'S GRIP

Media guidelines are still in effect despite lifting of national emergency



By CARMELA FONBUENA

TWO MONTHS after President Arroyo lifted the state of national emergency, the National Telecommunications Commission (NTC) is yet to withdraw program standards it set for the broadcast media.

There are no new rules, to be sure. The NTC merely adapted program standards set by the Kapisanan ng mga Brodkaster ng Pilipinas (KBP) and resurrected circulars issued in 1985, 1989, and 2001—when the country was also facing coup attempts. But the commission warned broadcast media against airing “materials which tend to propose/incite treason, rebellion, sedition, or pose a clear and present danger to the State.” (See Memorandum Circular No. 1-3-2006 at www.newsbreak.com.ph)

In the previous instances that the NTC sought to regulate media content, rules were only in effect during a crisis and were with-

■ NEWSBREAK AGENDA ■

WHAT'S MISSING IN THE CHA-CHA DEBATE?



HOT TOPIC: The panel (from left), Ramon Casiple, Mirko Herberg, Glenda M. Gloria, Miriam Grace A. Go, and Ibarra Gutierrez, listen to an animated Chito Gascon (extreme right).

THE ANSWER to that question, said former Constitutional Commission member Chito Gascon, is, precisely, a debate on the issues surrounding the proposed Charter change. Gascon was one of the speakers at a forum with journalists entitled, “Silent Provisions—What’s Missing in the Cha-cha Debate?” sponsored by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES), in cooperation with NEWSBREAK on April 5 at Annabel’s restaurant in Quezon City.

Mirko Herberg, FES resident

representative, pointed out the need to discuss proposed amendments to the Constitution in the light of the people’s initiative. NEWSBREAK’s Miriam Grace Go, Ramon Casiple of the Institute for Political and Electoral Reforms, Ibarra Gutierrez of the University of the Philippines’ Institute of Human Rights, and Tanya Lat of the Far Eastern University spoke on a range of issues, including the proposed provisions on civil liberties, economy, and form of government. ■

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PAUL MATA



‘FILIPINO-FIRST OUT’: Tanya Lat on proposed provisions on the national economy



QUESTION FROM THE FLOOR: Vergel Santos of *BusinessWorld*



REPORTER AT WORK: Journalist Raissa Espinosa Robles with Gascon



AFTER WORK: NEWSBREAK editors (from left) Marites Dañguilan Vitug, Gloria and Go



KEEN OBSERVER: FES’ Mirko Herberg

drawn as soon as it ended. The latest NTC circular was issued on March 3, the day the President lifted the national emergency.

The government clearly wanted a continuing media regulation. On March 2, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzales declared that the “government would still expect the media to follow the guidelines on media coverage even after the lifting of the state of national emergency.”

The media agencies and practitioners challenge that position. In a petition filed with the Court of Appeals on March 8, they asserted that “only a court, with its accompanying due process safeguards, may impose content-based prior restraints.” The complainants are also asking the court to annul the NTC circulars prohibiting media from broadcasting “subversive” materials and to prohibit the executive department from censoring them.

“NTC has no power to regulate media content,” said Jose Manuel Diokno, legal counsel to the petitioners. “There’s nothing in the law that expressly gives them [such] power.” NTC’s regulatory power over the media is limited to the issuance of franchises, he said.

“We’re supposed to be self-regulating,” said ABC-5’s Ed Lingao.

There is no test case yet.

Former NTC head Josie Lichaucio argues that the commission has power over media content. “It cannot be self-regulatory.” But she added that there is no need to issue the NTC circulars because there are enough provisions in the Revised Penal Code to punish media’s excesses. “[NTC] was doing it because it was the right time to do it. Everyone is listening. The intent is to scare.” (Lichaucio has allied herself with

anti-Arroyo groups.)

Apart from the NTC, several agencies in the executive department had dipped their hands into media content—formally and informally—during the weeklong national emergency.

The “chilling effect” started when the newspaper *Daily Tribune* was taken over by the Philippine National Police (PNP) on February 25. When asked if television and radio stations would also be taken over, PNP Gen. Arturo Lomibao answered: “This is a continuing evaluation.”

In a testimony at a Senate hearing on March 9, ABS-CBN’s Maria Ressa said that a “high official” in Malacañang called a network executive to stop its

live coverage of the February 26 Marines standoff in Fort Bonifacio. On television, Presidential Chief of

Staff Mike Defensor appealed to the media to stop covering the standoff.

The NTC later summoned copies of coverage footage for review. (Gonzales was subsequently quoted as saying that there were no “seditious reports” in ABS-CBN’s live coverage.)

The next day, Gonzales issued a memorandum to the National Bureau of Investigation directing it to “monitor...all radio stations...which intend to incite people to sedition.” He asked for “a day-to-day report.”

The government crackdown on media eased after the state of national emergency was lifted. But until they are withdrawn, NTC’s program standards still hang above the heads of broadcast organizations.

The case filed with the Court of Appeals is “going at a slower pace than we had hoped for,” Diokno said. No hearing has been set so far. ■

NTC has no power to regulate media content

—JOSE MANUEL DIOKNO

PRE-TAPED VICTORY

EVERYTHING WAS set—a written statement that was issued to select reporters before D-Day, “Proclamation No. 1” of the “new government,” and a videotape showing an Army general withdrawing his support from President Arroyo.

Last February 24, soldiers and their civilian allies were to march on EDSA to demand the ouster of President Arroyo. So confident were they of victory that Army Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim appeared on a pre-taped video reading a statement about his withdrawal of support from his commander in chief. NEWSBREAK learned that three other officers were with him—except that their faces were not seen. We have it on good authority that at least two Manila-based media organizations received a copy of the video—about a couple of days after February 24.

A print version of the statement was issued to a few reporters days before February 24. A portion of it read: “A crisis of proportions now confronts our nation...chaos and political factionalism remains to be the order of the day, thanks to a President whose legitimacy is denied by a vast majority of our people.” The statement added, “Pursuant therefore to our constitutional duty as the protector of the people and the state, and in response to the calls of our brethren in the armed services, we are hereby declaring our withdrawal of support from [the] illegal regime of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo.”

The statement and the video never saw the light of day.

In previous coups, military rebels didn’t think of pre-taped statements. To get their message across, they seized TV stations—which is why in nearly all the failed coup attempts against President Corazon Aquino, the mutineers’ first targets were the broadcast stations. Previously seized were Channels 9 and 13, GMA-7, and, of course, the government-run station, Channel 4.

Former Navy 1Lt. Robert Lee remembers that bloody day in August 1987, when the rebel command assigned him to seize Broadcast City (which hosts Channels 9 and 13). Lee got very specific orders: to bring around four of his men to Broadcast City, meet the “friendly” forces there, secure the area, and wait for a senior officer to read the rebel statement to be broadcast on the two stations.

The senior rebel officer never came so Lee was forced to scribble down a new statement. But they couldn’t broadcast since some equipment was missing. This was solved in no time, and after taking a deep breath, Lee and his men faced the cameras to broadcast the rebels’ demand for good government, etc. Soon enough, government troops swooped down on Broadcast City.

Lee got orders from the rebel command to stand his ground. “But what was the point?” he recalled to NEWSBREAK. The mutineers had been defeated by then. Lee escaped but was captured two years later. He has since left the military.

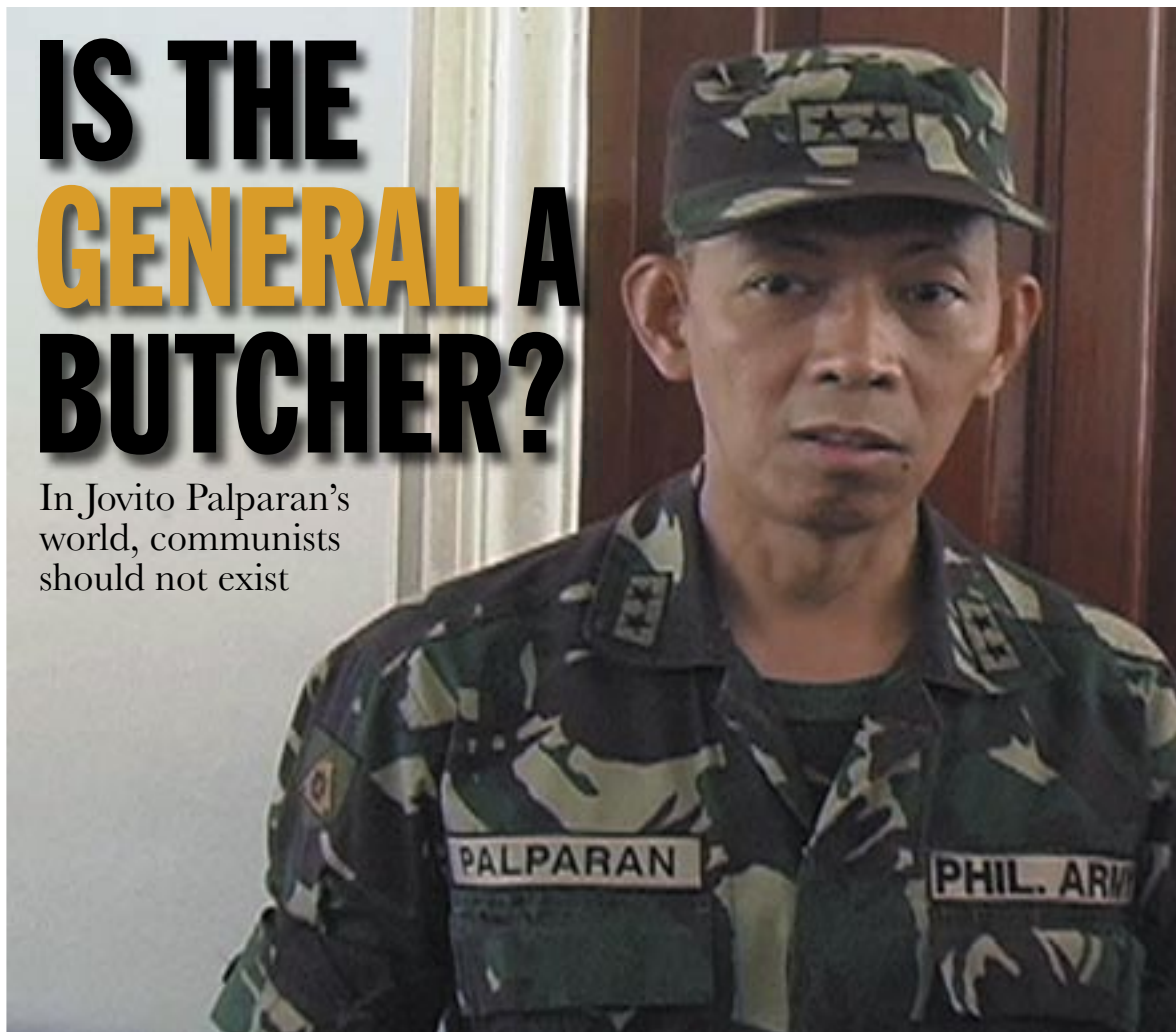
—Glenda M. Gloria



JOSE ENRIQUE SORIANO/SILVERLENS

IS THE GENERAL A BUTCHER?

In Jovito Palparan's world, communists should not exist



BORN: Sept. 11, 1950, Cagayan de Oro City

EDUCATION: Bachelor of Science in Business Administration, University of the East; MA in Management, Philippine Christian University; MA in National Security Administration, National Defense College

MILITARY RECORD: Commissioned, called to active duty to the AFP 1973; First assignment, eight years in Basilan and Sulu; Commander, 24th Infantry Battalion, Rapid Deployment Force, Doctrine Center, Task Force Banahaw, 204th Infantry Brigade, Philippine Humanitarian Contingent to Iraq; and Chief of Staff, Philippine Army.

By **TONETTE T. OREJAS**
in Mexico, Pampanga

IT WAS on April Fools' Day that Maj. Gen. Jovito Palparan Jr. first set foot in this long-time stronghold of the communist armies. That the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan of the 1939 Communist Party of the Philippines, the New People's Army (NPA) of the Communist Party of the Philippines, and the Rebolusyonaryong Hukbong Bayan of the Marxist-Leninist Party of the Philippines maintain their mass bases here did not daunt the self-styled counterinsurgency expert.

It was also a few days after the NPA observed its 37th founding anniversary.

Palparan, arriving by noon in one of several cars he uses, strode confidently to the school gym in Barangay San Jose Malino. In casual clothes, he looked more like a golfer than a two-star general. But he wouldn't let go of his military persona.

Before being put on-cam for a television interview, he asked for time to be able to don his Philippine Army uniform, complete with the insignia of the command he leads, Kaugnay, the 7th Infantry Division based in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija.

Over lunch, he talked about some of the military's successes. The five-month campaign in Mexico has liberated the town from the influence of the rebels. The remaining tasks, he added, was to pursue them at the borders, block their attempts to regain supposed lost grounds in Mexico, and "completely clear" all towns of rebels.

He has set an incredibly high goal that other commanders before him had not attained. By Sept. 11, 2006—the day he turns 56 and retires from the Armed Forces of the Philippines—he aims to have cleared the seven provinces of Central Luzon of insurgents. "We're talking more or less of 1,400 guerillas. That's veritably small," he said.

In the balance of forces, that's one rebel for every 10 soldiers in Palparan's division

of two brigades and six battalions. But how could he easily defeat the CPP's army, which has behind it 37 years of rural and urban warfare? Palparan was silent on the hows.

"*Paninindigan ko yan* (I'll live up to that goal)," he said when met with disbelief. He stares at you straight in the eye, and shifts easily from being downright serious to jolly. Right off, he said there would be no end to his rebel-hunting days, saying "I will retire, yes, but I will not retire from my counter-insurgency work. I will just be removing my military uniform."

Then, the lanky general buckled down to work. Giving "anti-communist" workshops was a task usually left to battalion commanders. But he did it by himself with the energies of a lieutenant and the theatrics of a pastor. For six hours, starting at 3 p.m., he rattled off the "evils of communism" to more than 600 people described as "former communist supporters" gathered for two days at a nearby gym. Then from 9 p.m. till midnight, he organized them in groups to plan "how as

victims you can be actors in bringing peace and making it reign in the town.”

That wasn't the end of it. He returned the next day, joining them for an “anti-communist rally,” the biggest to be organized in the town by the military since the 1980s. He also spoke, repeating what he said at the workshop. There was emphasis, however, on one thing. That the military was going to stay longer in Mexico to help in its “development,” projecting soldiers as “partners.”

“I'm at the forefront of this fight, militarily or propaganda-wise,” he said.

The man certainly does not hide his passion against, in his favorite phrase, the “enemies of the state.”

TRAIL OF KILLINGS

Palparan took command of the 7th Infantry Division based in Fort Magsaysay, Nueva Ecija, in September 2005. Even before he was assigned there, political activists in Central Luzon were being killed at an average of one per week in 2005. That year, 51 murders, mostly of peasants, were counted by the Alyansa ng Magbubukid sa Gitnang Luzon (AMGL).

The killings stepped up when Palparan arrived. From January to March 2006 alone, the killings appeared to have increased, with 21 dead.

The number of murdered activists in the last 15 months surpassed the number of rebels killed in clashes for the same period, reports showed.

“The reign of terror has always been there, focused on leaders and members of people's organizations or party-list groups, not on armed combatants,” said Joseph Canlas, AMGL chair. The regularity of the killings, leaders of activist groups said, indicate “state-condoned violence” against unarmed progressives.

Palparan, they claim, is “consistent” in his track record of human rights violations. As commander of the 24th Infantry Battalion in Bataan, also in Central Luzon, from 1989 to 1991, Palparan's supposed record includes seven “salvagings (summary execution),” a massacre, an abduction, five incidents of harassment, five illegal arrest and detention, two cases of grenade bombing, and a case of aerial assault.”

'BERDUGO'

As chief of the 8th Infantry Division in Samar and Leyte from February 18 to April 20, 2005, the general's shortest stint ever, he was accused of the killing of five people, two frustrated murders, five abductions, five harassments, two incidents of destruction of property, five illegal arrests, four aerial

bombings, and a food blockade.

As commander of the 204th Brigade in Mindoro and Romblon, he was blamed for no lower than 100 killings.

With close to 500 violent incidents to his name, activists have come to call him “*berdugo*” (butcher). Palparan said he's not affected by the derogatory label because it is “baseless.”

He suggested that his critics assess their own ranks, check out the “many enemies” they made in the course of their political work. “[Their enemies] have their own axe to grind. Perhaps they're timing their deeds with my presence so I can be the one who would be blamed,” Palparan remarked.

Canlas is certain that the killings stepped up when Palparan arrived in the region. The indications: these were directed more against activists instead of rebels; the attacks happened at any day at any time, were carried out by a pair or a bigger group of

assassins; and most of these took place in areas where soldiers under Palparan had a strong presence.

Palparan said that none of the incidents attributed to him provides direct evidence of his role in the killings. Not one of the killers has been arrested.

Nonetheless, Palparan said he was using the tag to his advantage. “More people listen to me now because they're curious if that tag is true or not.” While the militants have portrayed him as a sinner, Palparan said he's no saint, either. “I'm just a soldier loyal to my country, to the AFP, and to the President.”

“He's the right man for the right job,” said Col. Herbert Yambing, Palparan's chief of staff. “With this kind of warfare that we are now in, I think if we have another two generals of his kind, the insurgency war will already end.” ■

▶ Verbatim

'WE'VE GOT TO HATE THE MOVEMENT'

On why he became a soldier

My father was a soldier. When I was in college, I didn't like my course. The ROTC was a way of making my study a little bit comfortable.

On being called a butcher

It is a creation by my enemies, the enemies of the military. They want to create a picture of myself as a brutal criminal and a person who is...doing illegal things. Where I am assigned, people are getting better lives. We're improving the situation in areas that the AFP has liberated.

On the communist movement

We've got to hate the movement. We've got to have that fighting stance. The movement should be eradicated. It should be eliminated.

On his approach to ending the insurgency

We have an armed enemy that is not too big, but it is effective because it has an intelligence network which is providing the information against us. This is psychological warfare because this is a war for popular support.

We have been distrusted through propaganda. So we have to get back the trust of the people, present ourselves as real soldiers, not abusive, not brutal, not criminal. So we go to the people, conduct community operations to dialogue with them. We are motivating people to defend themselves because the soldiers cannot defend our people all the time. There's no way to win the war except to motivate the



people to defend themselves.

On leftist activists and organizations as target of military operations

What a number of these legal organizations are doing is illegal. We have to act on the illegal activities of these groups. If these organizations basically act as conduits [of the NPA] then we will have to do it. I don't know how. Up to now we are collecting information on members who are doing illegal activities.

On what constitute illegal acts

They kill people. They threaten people. They are collecting revolutionary taxation. They are training or recruiting [people] to be part of the NPA. Most of their leaders came from illegal organizations. Like Satur Ocampo, a former NPA, he did not surrender. He joined the legal movement. You have to push a case for that. They have not renounced their membership from the CPP. The CPP is supposed to be legal....Under that party they have the NPA and the NDF. The NPA is the one we are running after. ■



DROP BY DROP

A new study shows worrisome findings on the pace at which the Philippines is moving to improve the poor's access to water services

By **MELISSA HOWELL ALIPALO**

FOR HOURS on end, Faridah Sultan would stare outside her one-window shanty and wonder how she tolerates the world that waits just outside her doorstep. Canals—the ones she crosses every day—sit lifeless beneath blankets of litter. Piles of trash constantly burn on the periphery. Raw sewage snakes through the hundreds of huddled shacks. Flies stick to everything. Worst of all, “not a drop of water.”

In 2000, she and 17 of her family members left Mindanao when fighting between the military and insurgents reached too close for comfort. In Manila, they set up home in a new Muslim community emerging on the land reclamation area along Roxas Boulevard, in Baclaran, just across from Baclaran Church. There is nothing greener about these pastures. “Sometimes I ask myself why I want to stay here,” Sultan said. “I am not poor in the province. I am not squatting. I have a concrete house there. I have water.”

Sultan's world represents the cause-and-effect

pressures that local governments in the Philippines and across the developing world are under: armed conflict, unprecedented urban migration, lack of housing, population growth, and inadequate infrastructure and public services unable or unwilling to handle the increasing demands, particularly from the poor.

More and more, development experts believe that the key to unlocking the poverty

trap on a wide scale is found in the one thing that much of the world and its better-off take for granted: safe, reliable water.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the universal stick for both prodding and measuring government progress against poverty, lists water as a main indicator of poverty that must be dealt with. Specifically, MDG Target 10 calls for governments to cut in half, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.

What awaits this achievement is a positive chain reaction that includes freeing up the poor's time—mainly mothers and daughters—to pursue more important activities, like employment and schooling, rather than fetching water for hours on end every day.

Why are the poor of Tondo paying more for their water than the rich of Forbes park? — FIORELLO ESTUAR



CONTRIBUTION OF WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION TO THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

GOALS AND TARGETS	IMPACTS ON MDGs
GOAL 1 Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger Target 1: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of persons whose income is \$1 a day Target 2: Halve, between 1990 and 2015, the proportion of people who suffer from hunger	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Water as a factor of production in home-based production^{**} ■ Investments in water infrastructure and services as a catalyst for local development⁺ ■ Reduced water-related hazards and ecosystems degradation⁺ ■ Improved health increases productive capacities⁺ ■ Reliable water and fertilizers from wastewater and human excreta for subsistence agriculture, home gardens, livestock, tree crops⁺
GOAL 2 Achieve universal education Target 3: Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved school attendance from improved health and reduced water carrying burdens, especially for girls^{**}
GOAL 3 Promote gender equality and empower women Target 4: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels of education not later than 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Community-based organizations for water management including women improve social capital.⁺ ■ Reduced time and health burdens from improved water services increase earning and saving activities and more balanced gender roles⁺
GOAL 4 Reduce child mortality Target 5: Reduce by 2/3, the under-five mortality rate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved quantities and quality of water and sanitation reduce main morbidity and mortality factor for young children^{**} ■ Improved nutrition and food security reduces susceptibility to diseases^{**}
GOAL 5 Improve maternal health Target 6: Reduce by ¾ between 1990 and 2015, the maternal mortality ratio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved cleanliness, health, and reduced labor burdens from water portage reduce mortality risks^{**} ■ Improved health and nutrition reduce susceptibility to anemia and other conditions that affect maternal mortality⁺
GOAL 6 Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases Target 7: By 2015, halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improved health and nutrition and increased incomes reduce susceptibility to HIV infection and the onset of AIDS⁺ ■ Better water management reduces mosquito habitats, malaria incidence, and other diseases^{**}
GOAL 7 Ensure environmental sustainability Target 9: Integrate the principles of sustainable development into country policies and programs and reverse the loss of environmental resources Target 10: By 2015, halve the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation Target 11: By 2020, to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Pollution control and sustainable levels of abstraction and eco-sanitation methods reduce water consumption and recycle nutrients and organics^{**} ■ Actions to ensure access to adequate and safe water for poor and poorly-served communities^{**} ■ Actions to ensure access to improved and if possible of productive eco-sanitation for poor households^{**} ■ Health and hygiene promotion activities to ensure greater service coverage generate improved health benefits^{**} ■ Develop operation and maintenance and cost recovery systems to ensure sustainability of service delivery^{**} ■ Actions to improve water supply and sanitation services for urban poor communities^{**} ■ Reduced waterborne pollution and wastewater discharge and improved environmental health in slum areas^{**} ■ Communities organized around water supply provision better placed to negotiate for other needs⁺⁺⁺
GOAL 8 Develop a global partnership for development Target 13: Address the special needs of the least developed countries Target 14: Address the special needs of land-locked countries and small island states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Actions to reform water sector and invest in needs of the poor demonstrate poverty reduction commitments⁺ ■ Water problems (e.g., water scarcity, salinity, pollution) major constraint on development in these countries⁺
*Direct Contribution +Indirect Contribution **Significant Impact ***Major Impact Source: Poverty Environment Partnership: Linking Poverty Reduction and Water Management	

Last month, a new report by the Asian Development Bank, World Health Organization (WHO), and two United Nations agencies uncovered the performance levels of Asian countries in meeting Target 10. The Philippines is a mixed bag of news—some good, some bad, some simply hard to believe.

NOT ON TARGET

The bad news: the Philippines is not on target to meet the water MDG because of its lack of progress in making drinking water accessible—a worrisome sign that it may not meet other MDGs that depend on improved water services, such as reducing extreme poverty, hunger, and child mortality, and improving maternal health. In fact, drinking water coverage is shrinking in urban areas and shows no rate of change in rural areas. Any expansion in coverage is evidently not keeping pace with population growth rates.

Antonio de Vera, a 25-year veteran of the Local Water Utilities Administration and current chairman of the Subic Water Regulation Board, said that another reason for the stalled expansion rates is the deterioration and total breakdown of systems. In Western Manila, which is served by Maynilad, deteriorating pipes were losing 80 percent of the water they were carrying as of 2004, said Maynilad President Fiorello Estuar.

The good news: the Philippines is on course to reduce by half the number of urban and rural Filipinos without “improved” sanitation facilities. The improvements may be next to the lowest in technology—simple pit latrines—but the finding is quite phenomenal. Few countries that are off track for drinking water coverage rates make it on track for sanitation. Investments in sanitation have historically received less attention than drinking water services. The Water Watch report even projects that the Philippines could provide 100 percent coverage in both urban and rural areas if it maintains past rates of expansion.

The trouble with projections like these, said Terrence Thomsons, regional adviser on environmental health for the World Health Organization, is that “it is a big assumption that the rate of past increases will continue. It’s just a mathematical projection. There is no analysis on whether there are special initiatives or on the level of investments going into the sector.” He also notes that increasing people’s access to sanitation facilities, like latrines, does not guarantee their use or hygienic upkeep.

De Vera doubts the report’s accuracy on sanitation coverage. “Just try finding one successful sanitation project,” he said. “They are hard to come by.” Estuar seconds that, point-



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ing to his own company's struggle to meet internal sanitation targets. "We had a World Bank project that was supposed to connect 10,000 people to sanitation system. To date, there have been only 1,000 connected."

A major hurdle, both he and sanitation experts the world over say, is convincing people that they have to pay for sanitation. It is the equivalent of asking people to flush money down the toilet—money they may not have in the first place, or at least not enough for them to willingly spare for yet another household bill.

NEEDED: PROFESSIONAL, NOT POLITICAL UTILITIES

The point of the MDG campaign, and of reports like Asia Water Watch 2015, is not so much to point fingers at countries doing a bad job, as to motivate public inquiries into why more progress isn't being made. De Vera is working with the German Development Agency (GTZED) to develop a strategy that will put the Philippines on the success track for the water MDG target. The GTZED team has identified three major problems: decreasing government and private sector investments to expand water supply services, unsustainability of local water utilities, and lack of institutional support for local governments responsible for water service delivery.

At the heart of these factors is the touchy subject of full-cost recovery—charging customers what it actually costs for basic operations and maintenance of the water service. By law, utilities must charge full-cost recovery rates, but poor billing and collection processes rarely bring in the minimum revenues needed.

The full-cost recovery rate does not include costs for expanding services to new—mainly poor—areas. That would require raising tariffs or taking on loans—both have proved next to impossible for local governments, De Vera said. "The local water utilities are not run professionally. They are run politically. Since local officials are only in office three years, they only rehabilitate the facilities that are breaking down, not building new ones. Higher tariffs are need for that. And there's no political will for that, either."

So in the meantime, utilities limp along and the poor cope, more often than not, by buying water from small-time water vendors, who basically resell tap water at inflated rates, yet the poor pay because like always—they have fewer choices.

After coming on board as Maynilad president in 2004, Estuar said he had learned that technical solutions are not enough to get the



LUIS LUMANAG

COVERAGE AND PROJECTIONS FOR 2015 FOR WATER MDG TARGET

	Served Population (%)		Projections for 2015	On Track (?)
	1990	2002		
Improved Water Supply ¹				
URBAN	93	90	87	NO
RURAL	82	77	77	NO
Improved Sanitation ²				
URBAN	63	81	100	YES
RURAL	46	61	71	YES

Source: Asia Water Watch 2015 (Asian Development Bank, World Health Organization, United Nations ESCAP, UNDP)

¹ "Improved" water supply does not automatically mean that the water is safe. Rather, it denotes that water is more accessible, and some measures have been taken to protect the water source from contamination. Improved technology includes: house connection, standpost/pipe, borehole, protected spring or well, collected rainwater, water disinfected at the point of use; and does not include: unprotected well, unprotected spring, vendor-provided water, bottled water, water provided by a tanker or truck.

² "Improved" sanitation generally involves better access and safe disposal of excreta. Improved technology includes: sewer connection, septic tank, pour flush, simple pit latrine, ventilated improved pit latrine; and does not include: service or bucket latrines, public latrines, latrines with an open pit.

THE KEY TO UNLOCKING THE POVERTY TRAP IS FOUND IN THE ONE THING THAT MUCH OF THE WORLD TAKE FOR GRANTED: SAFE, RELIABLE WATER



MELISSA ALIPALO

JUST ADD WATER

WHETHER THE general public—and even government agencies—know it, most countries in the developing world are under a deadline, one they signed up for, to radically reduce poverty. In 2015, the United Nations will be waiting at the finish line to see which countries met the Millennium Development Goals. In the latest of progress reports, the Asia Water Watch 2015—a joint study by the Asian Development Bank, World Health Organization (WHO) and two United Nations agencies, pleads the case for Asia to consider more seriously increasing investments in the water sector as a strategy for meeting all the MDGs.

The report argues that every US\$1 invested in delivering safe drinking water and sanitation facilities to the poor returns \$6 in benefits, particularly in raising health, income, and education levels. With access to safe water and a cleaner immediate environment, the poor—mainly women and children—can devote more of their time to earning an income and an education. Entire households will be less threatened from water-related diseases and illnesses, with diarrhea being the single leading cause of child deaths. “It is the height of economic irrationality to not invest in these vital services,” the report states.

Yet many countries are not taking advantage of their water sectors to reduce poverty. The Water Watch report gives a country-by-country accounting of progress in meeting the water-related MDG, Target 10: to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation.

The report credits Asia with making “re-

markable progress,” yet facing “a particularly formidable challenge.” In China alone, for example, there are nearly as many people without access to safe drinking water as all of the unserved in Sub-Saharan Africa. Two billion of the 2.6 billion people without access to improved sanitation globally live in Asia and the Pacific.

On a more imaginable scale, one in five Asians does not have access to safe drinking water, and worse, one in two Asians does not have access to improved sanitation, according to the report. In general, strides to improve sanitation trail the rate that drinking water services are expanding.

The Philippines presents the rare case of a country not on target to meet adequate drinking water coverage levels by 2015, but on track in improving sanitation.

In 1990, the year baseline data was gathered for the MDG campaign, the Philippines and Indonesia posted some of the highest drinking water coverage levels in Southeast Asia. By 2002, though, both countries showed regression, becoming the only two countries in the subregion not projected to meet the drinking water target by 2015. The entire region, however, joins them in struggling to meet the necessary coverage levels for drinking water in rural areas.

Southeast Asia comes out strongest in the wider Asian region for improving sanitation coverage levels in both urban and rural areas. In 1990 and 2002, the Philippines posted middle-of-the-road coverage levels and is on course to meet the sanitation target, possibly reaching 100 percent coverage in urban areas by 2015.

—Melissa Howell Alipalo

poor connected. As an example of what is possible, he talked of Tondo, the notoriously impoverished and densely populated port district in Manila. In only 75 days, Estuar said, Maynilad connected 3,000 households using an alternative system—an aboveground piped network—that reduced system water losses from 90 percent to just 10 percent.

“We treated this community as a field laboratory. It was less of a business transaction and more of a social transaction.” That doesn’t mean the poor don’t pay for the water piped to them. “When somebody gets it free, somebody else pays for it.” He calls instead for fair, affordable charges, and hopes that the regulatory board will address some longstanding inequalities between what it forces Maynilad and Manila Water to charge. “Why are the poor of Tondo paying more for their water than the rich of Forbes Park?” he asked. “That needs some action.”

ONE CONNECTION: IT’S A START

In Baclaran, Sultan’s family coped by making several trips to a water store about a mile and a half away to buy about 10 five-gallon containers of water for the day’s cooking, bathing, and drinking. The chore had often become even more laborious as officials repeatedly tear down the only bridge leading from the main road over the canal waters to Sultan’s neighborhood, which many take as an indirect way of saying the Muslims aren’t welcome.

Sultan lamented her lowly economic station but then tried to find the silver lining. “It’s a hard life here, but at least I can now say I have a new experience—being poor. Because I’m not poor in the province. But these days, money comes easier here. My mind changes every day as to whether we should go back or not.”

One day, Sultan finally did make up her

mind—and left. She never got what she was waiting for, and what finally came earlier this year—a water connection. It is a less than perfect setup, but the local mosque leader, Ismael Guinar, said it had made life a lot easier, as well as expensive. “Can you imagine how much water 7,000 people consume in one—and from one hose?” Almost P6,000 worth each day, taking the hose from one house to the next, filling up tanks and barrels for a fee. “And this hose is still not enough. So we have to get private water trucks to come in. We just text them, and they come. What else can we do?” ■

MELISSA HOWELL ALIPALO, a journalist and consultant for the Asian Development Bank (ADB), worked on the Asia Water Watch 2015 report. The views expressed in this article in no way reflect or are connected to those of the ADB.



PORNCHAI KITWONGSAKUL/AGENCE

THAKSIN'S FOLLY

It was the combative prime minister's bluster that did him in

By **PATRICIO N. ABINALES**

IN THE END, it was his bluster that did him in. Soon after the April 3 parliamentary elections, Thailand's combative Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra dared the opposition People's Action for Democracy (PAD) that if they stopped their rallies "in the interest of the nation," he would step down. They called his bluff and told their supporters to go home. This provided the opening for King Bhumibol Adulyadej to also take up Thaksin on an earlier boast that if the King whispered to him that he must resign, he would follow the revered monarch.

According to political scientist and Mahidol University lecturer Coeli Barry, there were deeper reasons why Thaksin's dream of becoming Thailand's greatest prime minister ended abruptly and quite unceremoniously (Thaksin and his wife faced the media unannounced after his meeting with the King, informed them of his decision, and left the palace driving his own car.)

Foremost was the refusal of the Thai military to get involved in the confrontation between Thaksin and the PAD. Unlike the fractious Armed Forces of the Philippines, the Thai army rejected Thaksin's plan to declare a state of

emergency. Then, after meeting with Thaksin, Army chief General Sonthi Booyaratglin's publicly praised the PAD rallies as one of the most peaceful ever, signaling that the army would not take sides.

Barry also pointed out the profound impact of the abstention votes in the April 3 elections. Thaksin won 57 percent of the popular votes, given his solid support from the rural areas (except the Muslim south), but abstention votes in Bangkok and the south were

equally high: 50 percent of Bangkok Thais lined up in the voting booths to simply write "No," some even with their blood, while Thai Muslims boycotted the polls.

A major reason for this urban outrage was Thaksin's decision to sell Shin Corporation to Singapore's Temasek Holdings and then not paying a single baht in sales tax. "In the eyes of many what he did was *bastos*," said Barry, who is also an expert on the politics of Filipino Christianity. The Thai middle class, like their Filipino counterparts, can tolerate some corruption in government, but the sale of Shin Corporation was simply too much.

Thaksin had thus become a pariah in the national capital (very much like Gloria Arroyo), and the election boycotts in the Muslim south proved the failure of his punitive anti-separatist campaigns (on this, Arroyo is more successful). These were enough for his allies in the Thai Rak Thai party to abandon him.

"TRT was a coalition whose main basis of unity was Thaksin's money," Barry noted. Thaksin's billions attracted provincial and city politicians seeking sources of largesse to feed their

patronage networks. And as long as the money kept coming in, they remained loyal to him."

The April 3 elections exposed the fragility of this unity. When Thaksin issued his dare, only a few of his leaders backed him up, and top TRT Deputy Sudarat Keyuraphan disappeared from the public scene. Fearful

of what Thaksin's fall could do to patronage resources, TRT politicians began to hedge their bets and explore other options. "It became clear to Thaksin that he had very few friends," Barry said.

The crisis has boosted the anti-Thaksin movement's political capital, especially the opposition Democratic Party, which has lost a lot parliamentary seats since Thaksin rose to power. It has also significantly lifted restrictions on the media. The self-censorship that had become insidious ever since Thaksin used the courts to intimidate journalists and his money to buy control of newspapers like *The Bangkok Post* has disappeared. As the protests became more intense, even the usually timid television networks began to show some nerve. They began showing "live feeds" of the rallies and interviewing opposition leaders.

Thaksin's departure, however, does not necessarily mean the end of his political presence. The opposition's celebration was short-lived once it realized that Thaksin would still be in parliament. "He may be a backbencher, but he is not out of the game," was the way Barry put it. He has money and he has the rural votes, thanks to his populist program. Already, his supporters have discovered that they, too, can use the opposition's weapons to harass the latter. A "caravan of the poor" from the provinces has already waged its counter-rallies, targeting media institutions like *The Nation*, which are critical of Thaksin.

Suriyasai Katasila, secretary-general of the Campaign for Popular Democracy and a PAD coordinator, has suggested that the opposition go to the next stage: Thaksin has been ousted; now it is time to uproot the regime of money politics that brought people like him to power.

This will be the decisive turn, but it is also one fraught with danger. ■

Thaksin may be a backbencher, but he is not out of the game

— COELI BARRY

BIG BANKS GO SMALL TIME

Profit and good corporate citizenship drive them into microfinance

By MICHAEL CRUZ

THE MICROFINANCE bug has bitten a very unlikely part of the business community. The country's largest banks are getting more involved in giving out collateral-free loans to the "poorest of the poor"—the very same scheme that was devised as an answer to these banks' reluctance (often, outright refusal) to lend to the poorest borrowers.

For many of these banks, the initial intention is to have a "feel-good" program to boost their image as caring corporate citizens and not the money-grabbing institutions they are often caricatured as. But down the line, profit is the main driver for these institutions for getting into the latest trend in banking.

Take for example the Bank of the Philippine Islands (BPI), the country's second largest bank in terms of assets. In an interview, its president and CEO, Aurelio R. Montinola III, said that the bank is taking cautious steps into microfinance as part of its anti-poverty advocacy and as a potential profit center in the future.

He admitted the banking giant's relative lack of expertise in the field, which often calls for more "people skills" than banking know-how. "What we're trying to do is relearn the game," he said. "We started out on a small scale."

The main obstacle in microfinance lending is that it is a labor-intensive undertaking, requiring the use of bank personnel to visit borrowers regularly to collect loan payments, check on the status of their businesses, and sometimes give entrepreneurial advice.

For a highly automated bank like BPI, the investment in extra personnel

for so small a program seems hardly worth it. Therefore, the trick for the bank is to go into it on a larger scale.

"We're in several areas," Montinola said. "We're involved in wholesale lending and we're also in capacity building, finding out where we can help."

According to the BPI chief, the bank has already lent out between P50 million and P100 million to other institutions like finance-oriented NGOs, which run the microfinance programs at ground level. More wholesale loans are planned. "In the medium term, we plan to expand this to P250 million."

To be sure, the bank's microfinance loan portfolio is a paltry sum in relation to its other activities. At the end of last year, BPI had a total of P446 billion in assets under management, and over P360 billion worth of loans in various forms.

Montinola admits that the process is prohibitive even for a bank like his. Thus, investing in "research and development" to make the lending program more efficient is high on BPI's list of priorities. "We want to help simplify the process and bring down the cost of operations [of microfinance]," he said. "Operating expenses are just as expensive as the funding component."

Another large bank involved in microfinance is the UK-based financial giant Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corp. (HSBC). The bank last year entered

into wholesale lending for microfinance institutions, similar to what BPI is into. "HSBC has established a partially secured one-year revolving credit facility for CARD Inc. (Center for Agricultural and Rural Development) amounting to P20 million at competitive rates," the bank said in a statement. "They will use these funds to open new branches in Visayas and Mindanao to assist about 4,000 microfinance customers."

HSBC also recently launched its "Opportunity Card" in partnership with Opportunity International. The Opportunity Card is a low-cost remittance card that will allow Filipinos in the US to send money to beneficiaries in the Philippines.

The bank is also engaged in advocacy work. "HSBC is working with the BSP (Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas) and the Microfinance Council of the Philippines to jumpstart a campaign that will communicate benefits and access to microfinance," the bank said. And to show that it is not just a fad, HSBC is also involved in microfinance programs in other countries with high incidences of poverty like Brazil and India.

The trend is catching on. According to the central bank, Citibank, Allied Banking Corp., and the United Coconut Planters Bank are also getting involved in microfinance, in addition to Planters Development Bank, which is a pioneer in the field. This is on top of the eight rural and thrift banks nationwide that are so far licensed to engage in microfinance.

The returns are lucrative as microfinance loans carry interest rates of up to 36 percent annually. This seems usurious compared with prevailing interest rates for normal loans, but they are extremely cheap when compared to loan sharks' rates, which can rise to as much as 1,000 percent annually.

Beyond just making money, however, getting involved in microfinance for large banks—all of which can easily make more money elsewhere—is a matter of good corporate citizenship.

BPI's Montinola says it best: "Microfinance is about empowerment. We want to raise the dignity of these borrowers." ■

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AURELIO MONTINOLA III: 'Microfinance is about empowerment'



100 YEARS OF BUD DAHU

Remembering the carnage in a crater

By MEHOL K. SADAIN

THE DAYS from March 5 to March 8, 1906, mark an ignominious chapter in the American occupation of the Philippines. On these four days, 790 officers and enlisted men of the American Army in the Philippines, aided by native constabulary soldiers, engaged in battle a recalcitrant community of about a thousand Tausug men, women, and children holed up in the crater of an extinct volcano in the island of Jolo.

What began as a ferocious battle, dubbed as the “Battle of the Clouds,” turned into a slaughter due to the sheer superiority of the Americans who fought with artillery, quick-firing guns, and Krag rifles fixed with bayonets against the kris, spears, stones, logs, and improvised shell explosives of the Tausugs. Four days after,

all but six of the Tausug natives were dead. The Americans suffered 21 dead and 65 wounded.

On the first day of the battle, March 5, the Americans assaulted bamboo and mud fortifications on the trails leading to the mountain crater where the main settlement was, peopled by families whose leaders

refused to recognize the Sultan whom they accused of collaborating with the foreign invaders and betraying the cause of Islam and the Tausugs.

The initial clash between the Tausugs and the US troops decimated the male population of the rebel community as it was the men who stood at the forefront of defense. And when it was almost impossible to halt the enemy advance, the Tausugs attacked in suicidal and fanatical frenzy to a hail of bullets, just to manage a slash or two at the enemy. With artillery fire brought nearer to the crater, the second-day clash turned out to be even more bloody and merciless, with the Tausugs never wavering in their fatal resolve.

What followed next was complete carnage, as the defenders of the crater, men and women alike, many of them wounded and greatly weakened by the constant bombardment, fatigue, and lack of sleep, their children huddled in fear and hunger, wearily took up arms and prepared to take on their foes in hand-to-hand combat.

SYMBOL OF COURAGE

The Battle of Bud Dahu was severely criticized by the Democrats, the American media, and members of the anti-imperialist movement in America.

The *Washington Post* editorialized in its March 15, 1906, issue: “The fact is that Gen. Wood is civilizing the Moros on the idea that there are no good Moros but dead ones.... There is no authority in the Constitution to shoot civilization into savages on the other hemisphere. If it must be done, there are empires and kingdoms over there that believe in it and are accustomed to it. Let them do it. If we cannot govern the Moros without murdering their women, better that we withdraw and let them govern themselves.”

Mark Twain, who was a staunch anti-imperialist in his time, wrote more graphically: “The naked savages were so far away, down in the bottom of that trap, that our soldiers could not tell the breasts of a woman from the rudimentary paps of a man—so far away that they couldn’t tell a toddling little child from a black six-footer....

So our men were at it four days instead of a day and a half. It was a long and happy picnic with nothing to do but sit in comfort and fire the Golden Rule into those people... Those savages fighting for their liberties had the four days too, but it must have been a sorrowful time for them. Every day they saw 225 of their number slain, and this provided them grief and

mourning for the night.”

To military men like Gen. Leonard Wood and the hawks in American media, the Battle of Bud Dahu was a tribute to American war supremacy. To their critics, it was a humiliating episode in American imperialist history. To the Moros, however, it stands as a proud symbol of their courage and love for land and faith. To this day, Bud Dahu continues to tower over the sand and foliage of the island of Jolo—a monument to the Tausug love for freedom and empowerment under Islam.

During the recent Balikatan in Jolo, participated in by Filipino troops and their American counterparts, commemorators of the Bud Dahu centenary, both Muslims and Christians, trekked to the peak of the mountain with the words “NEVER AGAIN” emblazoned on their shirts.

The mountain that is Dahu has stood firm all these years. Generations of Tausugs may have been shaken by reversals in the continuing battles for freedom, but Dahu, its myth and symbol now in full bloom, has remained constant and pure in the heart of the Tausug warrior.

That, and the lessons learned, are all that matter for now. ■

HISTORY IN POP-ROCK VIDEO

ONE LOCAL music channel chart show that relies mostly on text votes from young viewers has consistently placed in the top 10 several music videos from some newer Filipino pop-rock bands. But will the young, cellphone-armed voters also vote a music video like Cube’s “Bud Dahu: Digmaan sa Alapaap” into the top, along with the love, angst or humor-inspired videos of their current pop-rock favorites?

“Bud Dahu,” the Soxie Topacio-directed music video, speaks to viewers about the battle of Bud Dahu (Mount Dahu) in 1906, where about a thousand Tausugs lost their lives in a historic struggle against American colonizers. It contains

costumed actors in staged fight scenes and montages of actual pictures from the period—images the young ones see only in historical plays or educational tapes.

But the song off the band’s debut album **From Down Under** is very contemporary. Written by one of the band members and former UP Professor Mehol Sadain, the rap-rock vocal is similar to what mainstream rock fans recently heard from Evanescence. Nasty Mac, who became popular with his collaboration with Salbakuta on their breakout hit “Stupid Love,” does the rap for the song.

The song starts light with the remarkable use of *gabbang*, a traditional Tausug bamboo xylophone, then it gradually rocks out with the skillful fusion of the sounds of native and modern musical instruments.

The video, which has been shown at UP Diliman for the Bud Dahu Centennial Commemoration, is a new way of presenting history to a greater audience through excellent visuals (not the usual run-of-the-mill videoke-type visuals from many locally produced videos) and contemporary radio-friendly music.

The video may be contemporary, but not commercial. Many young viewers may not accord this video the same cult following they give their daily pop-rock fare, but this one is worth seeing—for some forgotten history lessons. —**Elvin Luciano**



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REINVENTING ONESELF

It's not too late to change careers. Four people tell us why.



BONGGOY MANAHAN

From Bar to Stage

A corporate lawyer is now a full-time actor

By FRANKIE LLAGUNO

THEATER IN Metro Manila is alive and well despite trying times. One observer from the academe notes that it has even gained a larger audience while competing with movies, television and the Web.

Among the most active resident theater companies in the metropolis today are Tanghalang Pilipino of the Cultural Center of the Philippines, Tanghalang Ateneo of the Ateneo de Manila University, Dulaang Pilipino of the University of the Philippines, and Repertory Philippines in its new home at Onstage in Greenbelt 1, Makati.

Repertory, the only group that stages all its plays and musicals in English among those mentioned above, has recruited some of the most talented thespians in the country today.

Bonggoy Manahan, 58, once a lawyer doing litigation and corporate work for a blue-chip law firm in Makati, is among Repertory's deep bench of recruits. After well-received performances in many plays and musicals since 1993, Bonggoy Manahan, an extrovert who was painfully shy as a child, is

now a veteran stage performer.

However, after being injured in a bicycle accident while training for a triathlon event in 1992, he found himself seriously thinking of a career change. The accident hurt the left side of his head and he had to be operated on. While on leave from his legal work, he was able to meditate on the nature and function of the human brain.

We are taught that each side of the brain has its unique and special abilities. The right side is intuitive, while the left side is logical. When one's head had been hurt, what means are available for recovery? The healing powers of theater occurred to Manahan.

It wasn't a chance inspiration because his theater roots go back to his grade school days and his family's genes.

In grade school at the Ateneo, Manahan excelled in readership and elocution. Thus, at the Grade 7 honors class graduation in 1953 where he was tied with another pupil as class valedictorian, it was Manahan who was picked by the Jesuits to read the valedictory address.

And then there was his mother who was a well-known television talk show host. He may have inherited his stage talent from his mother for whom he worked at one point as her show's floor director.

Would he stay in show business like his mother or enter the medical profession like

his father who was a noted Makati doctor?

He eventually chose the legal profession via the law school at Ateneo de Manila University, where he graduated in 1974. "If I were to appear today as a lawyer in a courtroom, I would be a much more eloquent advocate before a judge than I was in the past. The theater has a very powerful effect on an actor's communication skills," he says.

With the bicycle accident in 1992, his career shifted from bar to stage. In 1993, encouraged by his daughter Patty who was already a member of Repertory, he played a bit part in Repertory's *Les Misérables*, the hit Broadway musical based on the 1862 novel of the same name by the French novelist Victor Hugo.

The bit part led to leading parts. Manahan has just performed in Repertory's 2006 season opener, *Nobody's Perfect*, a cross-dressing comedy by British playwright Simon Williams rendered in a Philippine setting.

Manahan prefers comedy, if only for the instant feedback of laughter from the audience: "Comedy is hard to do, but the quick response from the audience is exciting because it tells me if I am good or not. In drama, applause comes only at the end, and you don't really know for whom it is given."

While he has performed in many plays and musicals for adults, Manahan also does children's theater. In Repertory's 2004 production of *Pinocchio*, the beloved children's 19th-century classic by Italian author Carlo Collodi, he played Gepetto, the woodcarver father of the puppet Pinocchio.

He was also in a 2002 adaptation of C.S. Lewis' children's epic *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* where he played Father Christmas. The play was staged at the Meralco Theater by Trumpets Studios, a group known for producing children's plays.

Manahan speaks of the healing power of creativity on stage. It has been long believed that in the act of creating, actors discover the grandeur of the human spirit, and so when they go back to "real life" there is an immense carryover. But theater, which, through catharsis, brings about the purification of our emotions, also empowers its audiences. In this light, actors like Manahan do not only heal themselves, they heal us, too. ■

LUIS LIMANAG



PAUL HUANG

Manager Turns Chef

He left the corporate world for the kitchen

By FRANKIE LLAGUNO

TAGAYTAY, THE highland place with a volcano embraced by a lake, continues to be a gourmet stop thanks to creative chef-owners like Paul Huang, 45.

Fire Lake Grill, Huang's 60-seat fine-dining restaurant, is among a group of eateries and shops at the Cliff House, a tree-lined enclave which looks like a cliff on a mountainside along Emilio Aguinaldo Highway.

Patrons of Fire Lake Grill, which opened in 2005, have a full view of Taal Lake and Taal Volcano and the lush vegetation of the surrounding hills. The breathtaking panorama serves as starters before patrons fo-

cus on Huang's menu, which he describes as continental cuisine with a French twist.

Until he retired from another line of work in 2001, Huang didn't know he would be running a restaurant with a well-trained 11-member staff.

A year after obtaining his arts and sciences degree from the Ateneo de Manila University in Loyola Heights, Quezon City, Huang joined, in 1982, San Miguel Corporation, the food and beverage giant. Starting as a junior executive, he later became group product manager handling the company's flagship San Miguel Pale Pilsen.

After 12 years he moved over to rival Pepsi Cola Philippines, the nation's second largest soft drinks company, as its marketing manager before going back to San Miguel.

He retired in 2001 after 20 years in the corporate world only to discover a few months later that he had brain tumor. Upon the advice of his doctors, he underwent an operation.

During his long confinement at the hospital, he thought seriously about what kind of work he would do after recovery. When he was with San Miguel and Pepsi Cola, he recalled how much he enjoyed cooking for family and friends to relax after a long week's work.

Thus, shortly after his release from the hospital, he enrolled at the Heny Sison Culinary School, the private cooking outfit run by Heny Sison at Bonnie Serrano Avenue in Quezon City. After the training from the culinary guru, he apprenticed himself to Ariel Manuel, the prize-winning chef who runs Lolo Dad's Restaurant on Quirino Avenue in Malate, Manila.

Before long, he was a chef at the Mandarin Oriental Hotel in Makati, working alongside other talented young chefs who have since opened their own restaurants.

The year 2005 was Huang's turn to open his own spot, in the cool highland place of Tagaytay some two hours away by car south of Metro Manila. He made a bid for a place at Cliff House, owned by the heirs of Dee C. Chuan, founder of China Bank, and asked the architect Vicky Ty to design a restaurant which he called Fire Lake Grill.

The design was done in minimalist style matched by modern minimalist paintings by artists Edwin Wilwayco and Jojo Lofranco. Such an unobtrusive setting allows Huang's menu, with its contrasts of tastes and flavors—like fire and lake?—to be the center of attention.

Here's a tasty menu sampler which Huang, an affable host, enjoys exploring with customers: blackened beef salad or smoked salmon and caviar for starters; cappuccino of pumpkin or grilled tomato for soups; asparagus and mushroom risotto or grilled miso-marinated barramundi fillet, for first course; grilled Certified Angus Beef rib eye steak, for second course; pineapple carpaccio or flourless chocolate cake, for dessert accompanied by a special coffee brew.

The grilled miso-marinated barramundi fillet, which was served with cilantro fettuccine topped with butter-glaced green beans, demi-dried tomato and citric vinaigrette, was a standout.

Huang devotes his full attention to Fire Lake Grill, which is open for lunch and dinner Tuesday through Sunday. His main diversions are visits to his wife, who works as marketing director for a hotel in Singapore.

Huang, an ever restless chef and restaurateur, is thinking of writing a book someday about his culinary experiences. That could lead to another interesting turn in his career. After all, as he says, "My work as chef and restaurant owner has changed my worldview." ■



PAUL MATA

TRISTAN CHOA

It's His Second Career Change

The MBA graduate is a yoga instructor

By CHRISTINA NELSON

AT 35, Tristan Choa is a career-change veteran. In his early 20s, after about a year of working with a company that sold industrial machinery, Choa had what he calls an early midlife crisis.

"I just felt that I wasn't earning my keep, I was depressed, I didn't feel I was performing," he says. One of his friends owned a restaurant in Intramuros, and Choa asked if he could help out in the kitchen to learn how to be a chef. He says he went from peeling carrots to making appetizers, but soon got restless and started looking for a job in finance.

The cooking gig gave him a great line to add to his résumé—"cooked for King Juan Carlos of Spain"—but Choa worried that the business world would overlook him. He was eventually hired as a financial analyst at Asian Alliance, a local investment house. He stayed there for two years before moving to New York to attend Columbia for his MBA.

After less than a year in Columbia, he realized he wasn't a typical investment bank-

ing student. "I would just go to the functions to get a free dinner, to save a bit of money," he says, laughing. His classmates went to network.

While the other MBA students discussed the details of Wall Street transactions, Choa started to rethink his goal of becoming an investment banker. "I met people who really wanted to be i-bankers and I said, 'I don't really have the personality to do that.'"

Almost six years later, after receiving his MBA degree and working for life insurance company Prudential, Choa opened Manila's first Bikram yoga studio in November 2005.

Choa was introduced to Bikram yoga, a more strenuous form of yoga practiced in heated rooms, when he was working for Prudential in Bangkok. He says he wasn't really interested in yoga at first—just in the girls who took the class. But when he started focusing on yoga, he started going to class four to five times a week.

It was in Bangkok that Choa first started thinking about opening his own yoga studio in Manila. He had been looking for a reason to return to the Philippines, and by his calculations, the yoga studio he went to was making a good amount of money.

But Choa continued with his job at Prudential, a three-year management training program that rotated him through more than four jobs in four countries in Asia.

Though he liked his work—which included writing speeches, training insurance

salesmen, setting up an internal Web site, and managing an office budget—Choa says he didn't feel fulfilled. "It doesn't eat away at you, but it's there."

More than just a passion for yoga, a few things made Choa think more seriously about opening a yoga studio. In 2004, Choa entered his last nine months with the Prudential program and started to consider where his career was going. He saw other participants in the program take jobs at local branches of Prudential, making a lot less money. Choa says he wasn't willing to take a pay cut, and started thinking about his options.

During his time abroad, Choa would visit Manila

and run into friends who were doing charitable work. He knew they weren't making much money, but they were surviving. It made him realize that opening a business was within his reach.

Still, yoga seemed a little too risky, he says, but it was the only thing that seemed to make sense.

Choa returned to Manila at the end of his three-year contract in 2004. He applied for jobs and considered taking a Bikram yoga teacher-training course in Los Angeles.

"I had a hard time making the focus on yoga because it's so uncertain. It was a risky endeavor so I had to hedge and apply for other jobs."

When he decided to take the yoga instructor course, it took a lot of people by surprise. But after years of planning the business in his head and mapping out a business plan on paper, Choa says it wasn't exactly a rash decision—he calls it "a passionate leap backed up by a spreadsheet."

Now, five months after his dream of a yoga studio became a reality, and more than a decade after his first major career switch, Choa says career change needs to be grounded in reality, "whether that reality is some passion for what you're changing into or grounded in some business opportunity that you see that other people don't."

The reality of running the dream, he says, is much different from the dream. "It has to be really strong to persevere in the face of your doubts and your external critics." ■

JOAQUIN PALENCIA

The Doctor, er, Artist Is In

This physician's work ranges from abstract paintings and sculptures to videography

By CHRISTINA NELSON

JOAQUIN PALENCIA calls himself “the odd one out.” In a family of doctors, he is an artist. In a field where attending gallery openings and networking is as important as producing art, he prefers to remain focused on his own work.

Twenty years ago, when his medical school classmates were preparing for careers in medicine, Palencia decided to become a full-time artist.

But after more than 30 solo art shows, commissions for corporate clients and a handful of art awards, Palencia is today as much a doctor as he is an artist. He keeps his physician's license up-to-date (he's a general practitioner), and every year he participates in a medical mission that treats about a thousand people who don't have access to health care.

“If what we base [success] on is the number of people helped and not money made, I'm also a successful doctor,” he says. “I grew up in a hospital. It's the nature of the family. Deep down inside I'll always be a doctor as well.”

In 1985, Palencia graduated from the University of the Philippines with a degree in medicine. He had been involved in art for two years already, and wasn't looking forward to the demands of a career as a doctor. When he decided to become an artist, he never thought about not succeeding. “I'm very pig-headed and if I want to do something I usually do it,” he says.

His family and friends thought he was going to starve, and Palencia says his decision was a “disaster” for his father, a doctor who hoped his eldest son would

follow in his footsteps.

“From a very traditional man's point of view it's like going into show business,” Palencia says, laughing. “My father had two or three excruciating years before my twin brothers graduated from medical school.”

Now all four of Palencia's brothers are doctors and his sister has a PhD in physics.

Despite the warnings of starvation, Palencia has stuck with art. “I was beside myself with the new possibilities with art. I didn't sit down and think about where I was going, I just did it.”

Even now, the 46-year-old Palencia still seems excited about the possibilities of his art. He's thinking about trying videography soon.

“It's like moving paintings. Most of the video that we see are narrative, they're stories. It's a new medium, something to play with. I feel like a kid in a toy store.”

Palencia has always experimented with new media. His work ranges from abstract paintings and sculptures to commissioned works for hotels like the Mandarin Oriental and the Makati Shangri-La. A bench he designed—made of metal twisted into an abstract dragon—will be displayed this year at the Busan Biennale Sea Art Festival in South Korea. His work has been shown in galleries and museums around Manila, and he'll soon travel to New York City, where his work is being included in an exhibit at the Philippine Center. Palencia also designs furniture that's exported to retailers abroad.

“I don't think experimentation should ever stop. That's what makes us creative,” he says.

And Palencia has never stopped experimenting—whether it's with art or with other interests. Through the years, he has become more and more involved in community

development and education, going as far as starting a PhD program in education with the University of the Philippines Open University. “It's the only way we can fast-track the development of the countryside outside Manila. [Education] is an incredible engine for change.”

Palencia hopes his work with the medical missions will help not only individuals but also the community. “As a doctor it's not just healthy bodies that you worry about. It's the community as well, not just the body.”

Despite the differences between the two careers, he is as fulfilled by his work as a doctor as he is with art.

“When you're a doctor, you have to think of the other person a lot. It's much more analytical. Art doesn't have anything like that except what size canvas to use and what colors to use. And then it's a free-for-all.”

Palencia sees himself not as someone who gave up one career for another, but as someone who's been able to integrate both into his life.

“I don't think anyone really gives up anything,” he says. “When you work at something for so long it becomes a part of you.” ■



PAUL MAYA

DON'T THROW AWAY THAT OLD CELL PHONE!

If you don't really need all those newfangled features, why buy a new one?

By GEMMA B. BAGAYAUA

DON'T HAVE an iPod yet? Still lugging around that hand-me-down Nokia 9210?

In today's techno-crazy world, gadgets are the new status symbols. To be in, one must have the latest PDA model—never mind if you never use half of what it is capable of doing.

But at times like these, when the prices of just about everything on your grocery list seem to be increasing exponentially, you may want to think twice before deciding to plunk your hard-earned cash on that sleek, new 3G phone.

Do you really need all those new phone features? Will you have the patience to figure out how to apply those innovations to your daily life? If you don't, that pricey gizmo may end up becoming either your technological equivalent of a white elephant or your everlasting source of frustration.

Since I acquired my latest phone, I have not found the need so far to activate its GPRS feature. After all, I am online most of the time and can access the information I need faster through broadband Internet.

Through pervasive advertising and promos that allow you to get new mobile phones for "free," many acquire MMS- and GPRS-capable phones. Recently, cellular phone companies shifted to promoting the new line of 3G capable phones. What is not mentioned much is that even though ownership of WAP-, MMS-, and GPRS-capable phones is widespread, usage of such services still accounts for a mere fraction of revenue from value-added services. For the most part, people still prefer good old, inexpensive "texting."

Here are a few tips on how to make the most of your budget for gadgets:



1. List the features you really need. Do you need something that will help you keep track of your schedule or manage your list of contacts? Check if the features of the device you have in mind really answer your needs. For instance, if you're after a camera phone that is not too expensive but takes passable pictures, Sony Ericsson's K700i is a good candidate.

But it has one handicap: despite its over 40 megabytes (MB) of memory, manufacturers choose to limit the number of contacts the phone can accommodate to a measly 500. Invest in a product that allows you to maximize the features you need most.

2. Upgrade your current devices. For instance, if you are not planning to use your mobile phone for surfing the Web anyway, your old Nokia 9210 might be all you need for now.

The 9210 precursor of today's Nokia 9500 (price: P40,000++) is almost like a palm-sized computer, complete with word processing, spreadsheet, and presentation software. During out-of-town trips, my 9210 still comes in handy. It allows me to take down notes without having to bring a laptop. The key problem is that it has only four MB of internal memory. To solve this, I added a 128-MB multimedia card (roughly P700) and routed my messages to the memory card.



3. Wait before buying new tech offerings. Try to get feedback from other consumers first. Some mobile phone/personal data assistant combinations tend to crash if all the features are activated. "Do-it-all" gadgets tend to be pricey. For instance, 2.5 XDA PC2002 sells at P38,000.

5. Consider your lifestyle. The idea of having 5,000 songs in your denim pocket may sound great at first. But think.

With only 128 MB of storage, my generic MP3 player (roughly P3,500) can only store a small fraction of the songs the iPod (price range: P12,000 to P24,500, depending on memory size) is capable of storing. It has a feature that is not native to iPods, though: I can use it to record as much as eight hours worth of interviews. To use an iPod for voice recording, you have to buy a plug-in device that costs almost as much as my MP3 digital recorder. ■



4. Check whether the new device complements your existing hardware and software. Backing up data is a must nowadays. Can your new device import data from Microsoft Outlook or whatever other personal information manager you are currently using at the moment? If the device you are eyeing syncs only through Bluetooth, and you have no cash leftover to buy a Bluetooth dongle for your PC, you may end up having to physically encode all of your contacts one by one into your new phone.



TERRY AQUINO

Watching Dolphins

THE DAY was exceptionally clear. The ocean underneath our boat was a perfect shade of cold blue; 'twas a perfect day for dolphin watching.

This summer is the best time

for it. Visit Puerto Bay in Puerto Princesa City, where lovely dolphins will greet you without fail. I've been into dolphin watching for nearly two years now at the mouth of Puerto Bay, and I

never missed seeing one. On this particular day, we spotted a pod of Spinner dolphins just after a 30-minute boat ride.

I was with wildlife vet Dr. Terry Aquino, who said that fishermen

consider dolphins as pests since the latter prey on the fish that they use as bait to catch tuna. After our first sighting, we saw a sea of dolphins. Dorsal fins popped out everywhere. Some jumped out of the water and did 360-degree spins in mid-air. Others got as close as two feet from our boat, even close enough to touch which, of course, is not allowed. The sight was astounding.

Hundreds of dolphins get caught in drift nets every year, which is sad since they can only give birth to a dozen young if they live up to 35 years. A good way of keeping them is through dolphin watching, which we can use to campaign for the preservation of their habitat.

Set aside four hours for it. Pack a bottle of wine, sandwiches, fruit—and a camera is a must (wrapped in plastic).

Dolphin watching courtesy of Island Divers is P1,100 per person, minimum of six persons. This package includes a four-hour (7-11 a.m.) cruise, water craft, land transfers, life vests, boat captain, bottled water/juice.

Call (048) 4332917 or 4335656; 0920-9280436. Visit www.islanddivers.ph.

—**Giga M. Songco**

VISIT PETA'S NEW HOME

ARTISTS OF the Philippine Educational Theatre Association (PETA) are gypsies no more. Thanks to its generous patrons, the four-story PETA Theatre Center has been completed and launched in January.

PETA now holds its stage plays in their very own Tanghalang PETA-Phinma—named as such to honor its biggest sponsor, Phinma's Ramon Del Rosario.

PETA will be celebrating its 40th anniversary next year. Through decades, it has kept Filipino arts alive locally while gaining recognition abroad. In 2005, PETA won Japan Foundation's special prize for culture and arts. For this honor, the PETA artists had a special audience with Japan's Emperor and Empress at the Fukiage Imperial Palace. The award cited

PETA for "play[ing] a key role in the formation of an Asian art network."

For the schedule of PETA's stage plays, call 7218604 or check out www.petatheater.com. PETA Theater Center is at 5 Sunny Side Drive, Barangay Kristong Hari, Quezon City. —**Carmela Fonbuena**



ELLA BASCO

DO YOU SUDOKU?

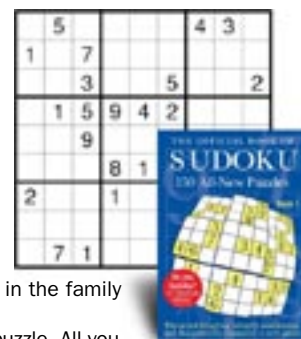
MANY SWEAR by it: it's addictive, good to keep one's memory agile, and a perfect way to stay busy during long flights.

I got to know of Sudoku when my US-based sister recently came home for a visit. She brought with her a number of Sudoku books. Quickly, the young ones in the family got hooked.

Sudoku is a puzzle. All you need is focus, a pencil, and an eraser. You need not be good in math. It's logic that comes to play here.

You can also check out the various sudoku Web sites—and brace yourself for a mind-tingling experience.

—**Marites D. Vitug**

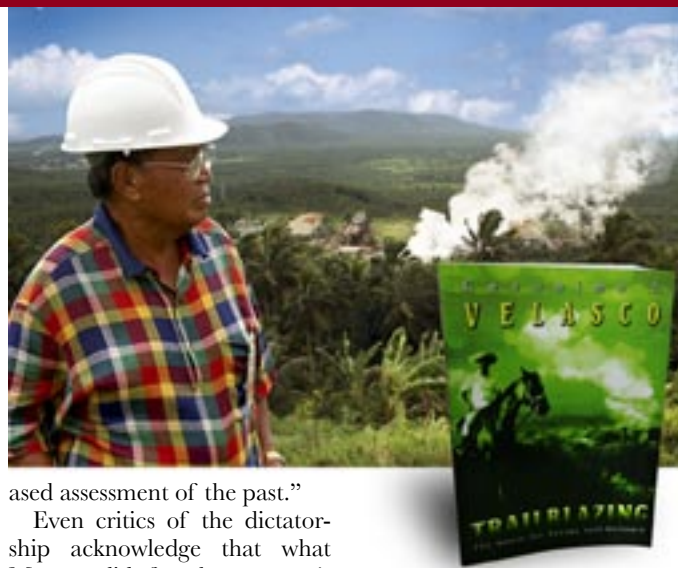


TRAILBLAZING: THE QUEST FOR ENERGY SELF-RELIANCE

Geronimo Velasco
Anvil Publishing, 2006

I WISH former Energy Minister Geronimo Velasco had written his book, *Trailblazing: The Quest for Energy Self-Reliance* (Anvil Publishing, 2006) 20 years ago. It would have been a useful reference in writing about the mothballed \$2-billion Bataan Nuclear Power Plant (BNPP), the pros and cons of privatizing energy facilities, and allegations of corruption involving Velasco himself.

Unfortunately, Velasco, who served as President Marcos's energy czar from 1973 to 1986, felt that "telling the real story would have to wait until such time when the passion of political partisanship had subsided sufficiently to allow for an unbi-



ased assessment of the past."

Even critics of the dictatorship acknowledge that what Marcos did for the country's energy infrastructure was one thing his regime did right. One only has to recall the 10 to-12-hour blackouts caused by the Aquino government's failed energy programs and policies. Under Velasco's leadership, the

Philippines' dependency on oil declined from 97 percent during the 1973 oil crisis to 46 percent in 1986. That was achieved through massive investments in hydroelectric, geothermal, and coal power plants. Oil depen-

DYNAMICS AND DIRECTIONS OF THE GRP-MILF PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

By Soliman Santos
Alternate Forum for Research in Mindanao, 2005

DYNAMICS AND Directions of the GRP-MILF Peace Negotiations is an extremely useful guide to those concerned with tracing the first steps toward attaining peace and ending a long-standing separatist rebellion in Muslim Mindanao.

Mindanao island-sympathizer and lawyer Soliman Santos gives readers an overview of how the principal actors—the Philippine government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF)—turned their attention away from constant warfare toward peace talks, with the most unlikely of supporters egging them on—the Malaysian and American governments. He explains the origins of the shifts of their political choices, and gives readers an idea of the strengths and weaknesses of each of the (former?) antagonists' positions.

This short handbook closes with a discussion on the prospects of a final and lasting peace and the obstacles that both parties and the Muslim communities face.

Santos tries his best to be objective in his assessment, but his biases are quite apparent. He calls the MILF "revolutionary" but does not assign any particular glowing adjective to the government. This image of the rebel group as progres-

sive is debatable, however, given the absence of any concept of "democracy" in the MILF's political programs and propaganda.

Santos calls the MILF's political perspective as one that favors "a system of life and governance." Is this a metaphor for a separate nation-state? Or is the MILF simply being philosophical?

Santos does not tell us, although I suspect he quietly loves the former to happen. A closet separatist, as it were.

The book also has a tendency to cast a wide net. A lean volume, 174 pages, wants to cover the purported century-long history of Moro resistance, current separatist and anti-separatist politics, the Moro National Liberation Front and the MILF, administrative structures like the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, and then a series of prognoses of where Muslim Mindanao's future may lie. This compressed density can be overwhelming to the ordinary reader; it also opens the book to nitpicking by specialists.

These are, however, minor failings. Despite its limited circulation (the NGO AF-RIM of Davao City published it and it is unlikely to get sufficient circulation outside the Davao orbit), Santos's latest work is the best book on the peace talks currently out there. One hopes it will inspire others to explore the negotiations going on in Muslim Mindanao in greater depth.

—Patricio N. Abinales



dency would have been even much lower had the BNPP project been finished and used.

The book's best chapter is on the BNPP because Bernardo Villegas' book, *Strategies for Crisis: The Story of the Philippine National Oil Company*, published in 1983, already covers much of what Velasco says in his book about the company he chaired from 1973 to 1986.

The chapter "The Tragedy of the BNPP" provides a good defense for why the plant should have been operated. Even the July 1990 Luzon killer quake, which had a 7.8 magnitude, did not damage the BNPP structure. If the BNPP had been put onstream, Velasco says that with net annual oil bill savings of US\$160 million a year from nuclear energy, "after 20 years, the nuclear plant would have paid for itself."

Instead, Filipino taxpayers have paid P61 billion in the past 20 years for the BNPP without getting any benefit from it. It still has to pay P6.3 billion in the next 13 years. Since President Aquino mothballed the plant due to safety concerns and corruption allegations, Velasco now says Mrs. Aquino should have used her "popularity" and "legitimacy" to "bargain for debt condonation." Says Velasco: "The nuclear plant had been mothballed then. Why pay for it? She was the darling of the Americans and she could have used that to her advantage."

Other chapters of the book provide solid arguments against the privatization and deregulation policies pursued by all post-1986 governments. Velasco believes the sale of Petron and the breakup of the National Power Corp. are partly responsible for the country's high energy costs. "With Petron and the NPC alone, the government has lost two strategic policy instruments," he says. "If we want a sound energy policy, we have to begin from scratch again, thanks to Cory Aquino and Fidel Ramos."

Trailblazing is a must read in another era of high oil prices.

—Isagani de Castro Jr.

UNLEASH YOUR POWER OF CREATIVITY

By Art Gogatz and Ben Mondejar
Sinag-Tala Publishers, 2003

IN THEIR book *Unleash Your Power of Creativity*, Art Gogatz and Ben Mondejar debunk the conventional wisdom that some people are born creative (talented) while others are not. They insist that all people are born creative, but they lose their creativity as they grow up by “conforming” to society and following “social rules that teach [them] how to function as adults.” People suppress their creativity for fear of looking foolish.

Aside from social rules, the authors also blame most traditional educational institutions for suppressing the child’s creative instincts. Many adults could surely empathize with the observation that test-oriented teaching “focuses on getting a preset answer that allows neither for alternative ways to accomplish things nor for alternative results.”

The authors are both teachers who have pursued graduate studies. The New York-based Gogatz holds creativity and English language training seminars while while Mondejar, a Filipino, is Harvard-educated and is currently based at the City University of Hong Kong.

The book has samples of self-diagnosing exercises that not just test one’s creativity but also reinforce the idea that creativity helps us see what others do not see or refuse to see.

The authors believe that it is possible to re-learn the creativity “somewhere between childhood and adulthood.” The book is not just a self-help tool; teachers and mothers as well as executives in the work place could also benefit from it. “The basis of creativity is seeing, feeling and understanding other perspectives. When you understand them, you stop being afraid of them.” Creativity empowers.

—Mylah Reyes Roque

US IMMIGRATION LAW

By Jim Lopez
Anvil Publishing 2005

LAWYER JIM Lopez acknowledges that for many Filipinos, the national outcry seems to be “Abandon ship” and “the national pastime is going abroad to live and work there.” With the voice of experience and research, however, he declares that it is only after “they have lived and worked in a foreign land...[that] they [will] realize that their homeland is still the best place on earth for Filipinos.”

US Immigration Law is a handy reference not just for the Filipino who seeks a green card but also for non-immigrant travelers and those who are already based in the US. The author discloses, for example, that aliens in the US now have to regularly inform the Department of Homeland Security of their current address.

The book describes how the US immigration system was radically altered by the 9/11 attacks. The changes are not limited to the institution of the biometric data collection process, which requires visa applicants aged 14 to 79 to undergo an inkless digital fingerprint scanning and facial photograph. Every day the rules change, such that even US-based lawyers have a hard time keeping track of them.

The author says that no less than Sen. Edward Kennedy had revealed that in August 2004, he was not allowed to board a plane to his hometown in Massachusetts because security officers did not recognize him and his name resembled an alias used by suspected terrorists.

The second half of the book offers the fundamentals and provides an insight on the intricacies of US immigration law. He compares the US visa to an “alphabet soup,” where the reader can

choose the right visa that fits his qualification and needs: from A (Diplomats), B1 (Business Visitors), B2 (Pleasure Visitors), C, D, E (Treaty traders & Investors), up to the complete range of H visas for temporary and professional workers (H1B, H2, H2A H2B H3), and all the way to V.

He also lists the different kinds of immigrant visas (from first preference to fourth preference), and the various methods of getting work permits and green cards. There is a chapter on dual citizenship, war veterans, lawyers seeking to practice in the US, and nurses whose profession allows them to get immigrant visas (that could lead to US citizenship in the future) because it is an occupation in which “demand overwhelms supply in America.”

What distinguishes this book is not the discussion of the laws but the first half, where the author draws from his 25-year experience as a Filipino lawyer practicing in California. He recounts the challenges faced by the early waves of Filipino migrants to the US, such as that it was only as recently as 1948 that they could be allowed to marry whites, and that Filipinos used to be classified as “Mongolians.”

The Filipino success story is buttressed by official US records. According to the 2005 report of the NY City Planning Department, Filipinos are the top-earning immigrants in New York City with a median household income of \$70,000, followed by Indians.

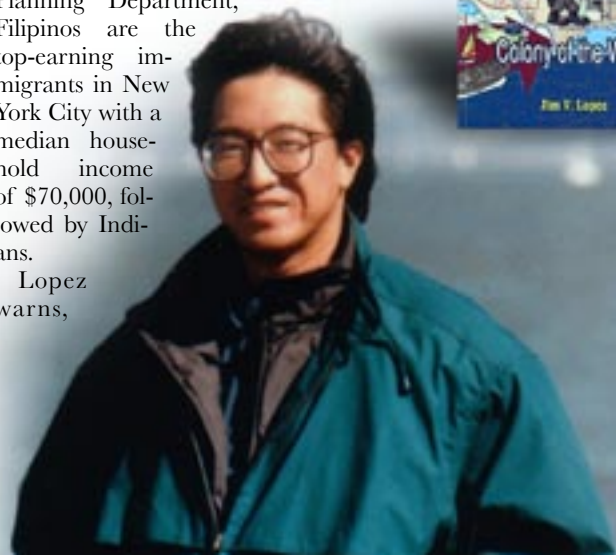
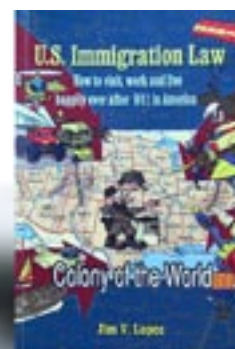
Lopez warns,

however, that there is an equally dark side to these tales. For example, he cited Gary Aldrich’s book *Unlimited Access* (1996), which related the experience of Filipino workers in the White House who threatened to quit en masse during the time of Bill Clinton, who “just ignored them” and treated them “like dirt.” Aldrich quoted a source that Clinton “didn’t even acknowledge they [Filipino workers] existed.” The Filipino employees relented only after Clinton “apologized to the Filipino staff, saying he had a lot on his mind.”

Would the reader still want to immigrate to the US after reading the book?

The author provides the reader with informed options but at the same time makes a persuasive argument against the American Dream. It is not surprising, however, if it doesn’t cure many Filipinos of the *virus of restlessness*, the belief that any other country is better than the Philippines. This is the same virus that moves many Filipinos to prefer the uncertainty of work abroad to the certainty of poverty.

—Mylah Reyes Roque



GMA's SUMMER OFFENSIVE

WHEN THE enemy is on the defensive and is unprepared, attack! This basic principle in the art of war is one of the grounds behind GMA's Operation Summer Offensive.

A March 10, 2006, memorandum from President Arroyo, a copy of which was obtained by NEWSBREAK from the Presidential Management Staff, orders all heads of government departments to submit a "Summer Work Program and Conduct of People's Day" in order to "bring the government closer to the people." Each agency is tasked to conduct a "Common Folk's Day" every Friday where the public can interact with officials on issues and concerns.

GMA's Summer Offensive started April 1 and will last

until the second week of June 2006.

A supporting document attached to GMA's memo lists the rationale behind the Summer Offensive. Some of the interesting ones are:

- Exploit the weather and political climate to our tactical and strategic advantages.
- Take advantage of the tactical withdrawal of the competition.
- Prepare and plan for future political challenges.
- Intensify political risk assessment and institute mitigation measures.

The primary mission of Operation Summer Offensive is to "consolidate our political forces and allies [to rally and generate political support]," among others.



PCPO

So, don't be surprised if the GMA administration is suddenly so nice to citizens, at least until the second week of June.

When school starts, that's the season when the opposition is expected to be more active again. June is when peasants start clamoring for genuine

land reform and students go back to school to assail tuition hikes. All these are part of the buildup to anti-government activities for the State of the Nation Address, and perhaps, the filing of another impeachment complaint, assuming the opposition gets 73 signatures. ■

POLITICS IN THE CENTRAL BANK

THE BANGKO Sentral ng Pilipinas earned major credibility points when it submitted a report to Congress confirming that the passport of former COMELEC Commissioner Virgilio Garcillano was indeed fake.

The report came at a good time for the bank regulator, as word was already going around that the central bank itself was party to the controversy, by allegedly having manufactured a clean passport at its security plant that would boost Garci's claim of never having left the country.

Insiders revealed that the "smoking gun" report nearly never came to light, thanks to the efforts of Monetary Board member Nellie Villafuerte.

If her name sounds familiar, it's because she proudly proclaims near the very top of her official CV that she's the wife of former Camarines Sur governor and now Congressman Luis Villafuerte who is, in turn, a staunch defender

of President Arroyo.

Central bank officials "disgusted" with the creeping entry of politics into their erstwhile independent institution revealed that Villafuerte's painstaking review of the findings of the team under Deputy Governor Armando Suratos effectively delayed its release.



NELLIE VILLAFUERTE

The BSP report only found its way to Congress after the committee in charge of the "Hello, Garci" investigation wrapped up its own report, thereby making BSP's findings on the fake passport moot and academic.

Maybe the central bank was trying to make it up to the President after the "Arrovo" bills fiasco?

To the credit of BSP Governor Amando Tetangco Jr., however, he approved the release of the delayed report despite efforts to have it buried under tons of paper—his *cabalen* roots notwithstanding. ■

UNHAPPY FATHER

JUDGING FROM his looks and bearing, this ranking military officer no doubt could easily pass for a perfect officer and a gentleman.

But not when it comes to family matters.

NEWSBREAK insiders say this officer abhors, to the point of even disowning, his son who happens to be openly gay and proud of it.

At one point, the officer-father once warned his son not to use their surname in a defunct television show that he (the son) starred in.

The son did.

The officer projects a perfect fatherly image to the young officers corps, even to the so-called adventurist type of soldiers.

Unfortunately, the same could not be said of his relationship with his son, at least for a time. ■



LUIS LIWANAG

THE INSPECTOR GENERAL HAS THE BALL

FOR THOSE awaiting the results of the investigation on the failed coup, the ball has been dribbled to the AFP inspector general (IG), Rear Admiral Rufino Lopez. He replaced Vice Admiral Mateo Mayuga, who is now Navy chief.

Immediately after the failed coup, the Army swiftly conducted an investigation and arrested a number of those involved. Brig. Gen. Danilo Lim, who led the attempt to withdraw support from President Arroyo, and other officers and men of the Scout Rangers, have been recommended for court-martial.

Army chief Maj. Gen. Hermogenes Esperon, apparently filling in the leadership vacuum in the Armed Forces, took decisive action.

However, action from the other elite unit that was involved in the plot, the Marines,

has been slow. We learned that one officer who sided with the rebels was even offered a scholarship in the US.

The Marines conducted an internal investigation on the standoff but not on the failed coup—and the results were recently submitted to the AFP IG “for further investigation.”

The IG is expected to put together the Army and Marine reports and make his recommendations to the chief of staff. As we went to press, the IG was still questioning some Marine officers.

That the IG has taken over the investigation is not meant to delay the process, an official at the Department of National Defense said. “It’s better this way since the chain of command is being observed and the Marines will have no chance to simply take care of its own.”

We’re holding our breaths. ■

HOT DATES

THIS spouse of a ranking government official apparently likes to play around, especially when he’s on overseas trips. Never mind that he’s in a public place.

Recently, we got word that he was seen in a hugely public event abroad with a young lady in tow. It was a hot date.

He didn’t mind the crowd while he unabashedly showered her with his full

attention. That’s the mildest and least ofensive way we can put it.

On another occasion, back in the country, Mr. Spouse went out on a date with another girlfriend, this time, a golfer. We hear that they’re an item on the golf course. His private life should be his own business, but it’s hard to ignore when it gets this public. ■

ELITE REBEL

ON MARCH 28, Marine Col. Ariel Querubin celebrated his 51st birthday at his quarters in Camp Aguinaldo.

What differentiated the latest celebration from previous ones was that several members of the elite reportedly graced the affair. The indication? SUVs parked along Regis Street.

Among his guests were Gregory Araneta and a member of Inigo Zobel’s family. (Inigo is a friend of Querubin.)

“The parking area was full of expensive vehicles all belonging to guests of Col. Querubin,” an insider said.

Previous occasions were marked simply, with guests con-



LUIS LIWANAG

sisting only of neighbors and fellow soldiers.

The birthday bash came as Querubin, reportedly under house arrest, is being investigated for leading the six-hour drama inside the Marine headquarters in Fort Bonifacio last February 25, a day after military officials claimed to have foiled a coup attempt against the President.

Querubin is also reported to have been a key participant in the plan to withdraw support from the commander in chief.

Times have indeed changed for this officer. ■

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